

Stress and Coping of Asian Young Women at a College of Further Education

Beverley Jane Thirkell

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Abstract

This study set out to examine the experiences of stress and coping of Asian young women in a college of further education. Using an *emancipatory* approach, within a qualitative framework, semi-structured and increasingly open interviews were conducted with 54 Asian girls, 14 non-Asian girls and 16 members of college staff. Asian young women were found to be dealing with complex and multiple issues as they faced competing tensions between the values and beliefs of their families and communities and the Westernised objectives of the college system. Asian young women were found to seek support from each other rather than reveal emotional difficulties to staff, who themselves were endeavouring to cope in the competitive market culture of the FE environment. The research hypothesis, that the emotional needs of Asian girls are all but *invisible* to college staff, was proved to be correct in this context. Although a small minority of Asian young women were visibly experiencing extreme anxiety and difficulties in coping, the majority of Asian girls appeared to be achieving a positive sense of self, thus challenging the stereotypical notion of 'Asian girl as victim'. The girls' responses indicated that this may be an opportune time to present an alternative descriptive lexicon, that takes into account the need for heightened awareness of adolescent development in globalised, pluralistic and multi-ethnic societies.

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PART ONE

Introduction

CHAPTER ONE

Aims

It is the intention of this study to explore the complexity of issues and competing tensions surrounding Asian young women in one further education setting, to be called Piper College, in a northeast London borough. The aim is to examine the nature and sources of stress and the coping strategies used by the girls. The research will focus upon the unique experiences of Asian young women, namely those whose ethnic background is from the Indian sub-continent (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh). The study will also explore college staff perceptions of the stress and coping experiences of Asian girls. The purpose is to examine in some detail the special position of Asian girls and listen to their hitherto unheard voices.

The Context

A Personal Perspective

My own interest in the subject stemmed from my work as an educational psychologist at Piper College, over a seven-year period. During that time, Asian young women were over-represented in referrals to my service, and I became increasingly aware that they were often referred due to concerns about underachievement, inability to concentrate, apparent depression or general loss of enthusiasm. In some more extreme cases, Asian girls were found to be suffering from panic attacks and hyperventilation and, in one year alone, three suicide attempts were brought to my notice. It seemed to me that this particular group of young women were experiencing significant difficulties in bridging the gap between familial, societal and peer pressures embedded in their 'two lives' of home and college. These students were not typically regarded as having

special educational needs; rather, their needs often seemed to go unnoticed by the majority of college staff. The girls merged into the background but tutors found themselves addressing unexplained absences, poor standards of work or a general lack of motivation.

In examining the reasons for my interest in the experiences of Asian young women, I am aware of close parallels with my own childhood and adolescence. The majority of the young women in the study were from a fundamentalist religious background, namely Muslim. I had been born into, and raised, in a fundamentalist Christian religion but as I entered late adolescence I became increasingly aware that this view of the world did not sit comfortably with my own. During early adulthood, my experiences led me to explore new philosophical and psychological possibilities, which inevitably resulted in my rejecting the views of the religious group that I had been part of. The relevance of my own story may be seen within the context of my interest in the lives of young women who were also part of a fundamentalist religion. I have long been fascinated by the importance and richness of contrasting cultures, values and beliefs and the development of my own post-positivistic views grew from various multicultural teaching experiences.

My curiosity about how children from widely different cultures worked and lived alongside each other, led me to explore friendship patterns amongst Bangladeshi children at a primary school in east London, where I had taught (Thirkell and Worrall, 1989). Teaching appointments in Haiti and Pakistan also brought new insights into, and an appreciation of, the value of perceptions that differed to my own.

Asian Young Women in Further Education

There has been much research in the area of teacher stress in schools (Kyriacou, 1989), as well as some recent surveys of staff stress in the college setting (Kirsch, NATFHE, 1994; Burrage & Stewart, 1990), but there is little research focusing upon the students themselves. The research hypothesis presented here suggests that the needs of Asian young women are largely *invisible* and by their nature are not easily defined. Asian young women in further education colleges have not been specifically researched before now, but there are several key studies that highlight the acute anxieties and tensions from which this particular group of girls seem to suffer (Ghuman, 1999; Biswas, 1990; Glover *et al.* 1989). It appears that Asian girls are especially vulnerable, exemplified by studies (Weinreich, 1979; Kingsbury, 1994; Merrill and Owens, 1986) that have found Asian young women to be experiencing difficulty with formation of identity and, in the 15 - 19 year old group, to be having higher rates of depression and suicide attempts than their Caucasian peers. The vast majority of these girls were born in the UK, their parents or grandparents having been first generation immigrants who brought with them religious and cultural values that are fundamentally different from those of indigenous people in the UK (Ghuman, 1999). The challenge then, for the Asian young woman, is to navigate the way through a sea of multiple cultural and societal contexts, whilst keeping her own unique identity intact.

This seems to be a timely and crucial area of research for the following reasons: second and third generation Asian young women are in a unique position in terms of historical and social factors; the complexities and apparent invisibility of their situation puts them in grave danger of being overlooked; since April 1993, when colleges became financially independent from local authorities, the further education sector has been subject to changing political climates and approaches to learning as well as new managerial styles, market forces and quality assurance measures; as Green and Lucas (1999) point out, the further education context itself remains under-researched.

Students at a college of further education are under unique pressures as they make the transition from adolescence into adulthood. At this time they are expected to achieve an autonomous identity and the ability to form close relationships. Young people are expected to exercise

“...self-discipline, judgement and control without the corresponding power and freedom of action.” (Chapman, 1990, page 73)

It seems that the formation of identity, as first described by Erikson (1968) and later elaborated by Marcia (1994), is generally viewed as a vital element of successful transition into adulthood. Weinreich (1979) studied adolescents from immigrant communities and found that immigrant girls, especially from Pakistani families, had the highest levels of *identity diffusion*. Ghuman (1999) points out that

“the quest for personal and social identity for British-born Asian young people ... can be fraught with more difficulties than for their white counterparts.” (page 2)

He goes on to suggest that there is a deep gulf between the values and social conventions of the home and those of the school and the wider society, and that girls are especially likely to have to face an *identity crisis* or *moratorium* (in Erikson's terms) because of the very different expectations at home and in the school, or college, setting.

The complexities of cultural and societal differences add to the potential pitfalls of the journey into adulthood. Triandis' (1994) model of *individualism* and *collectivism* is a helpful one. It serves to demonstrate the vast difference between the environment of the college, where independence and individual achievement are seen as primary goals, and the environment of the Asian home where the community, kinship and the family are of prime importance. The significant differences between life at home, the details of which college staff often know very little about, and life at college can bring a range of additional pressures. Coleman (1980) purports that, although adolescence need not be a time of 'storm and stress', where individuals have to cope with more than one interpersonal issue at any one time, it is more likely that difficulties will arise.

The specific focus of this study places the Asian young woman in the context of an FE college. Not only do Asian girls have to deal with their own unique situation as they balance the demands of home, college and wider society, but they also face a changing college environment where the increasing autonomy of *new managerialism* has given rise to increased levels of stress among college staff (Randle & Brady, 1997; Burrage & Stewart, 1990; Kirsch, 1994). It is in this setting that Asian young women strive to cope with their own needs, which may not always be perceived accurately by tutors. Both staff and students are attempting to fulfil their personal objectives in what is clearly a stressful setting.

In the current climate of FE, with market forces necessitating that all endeavours and innovations are cost-effective, it seems that giving professional time to support emotional needs may be too expensive, especially if they are not immediately obvious and do not bring the financial aid of the more traditional special educational needs (which are usually clearly defined in a legal document or *statement*). Those traditionally regarded as having special educational needs have been part of the ongoing process of inclusive education.

Much has been written about the move towards inclusive education and the accompanying debate about equal opportunities for all, notably the *Tomlinson Committee Report* (Further Education Funding Council, 1996). Students perceived as requiring learning support are often easily recognizable, although they often come from a diverse group. As well as supporting pupils with more general learning difficulties, inclusive education attempts to address the needs of those who have dyslexia, those who have experienced repeated academic failure, those who need study skills guidance, those with emotional difficulties, and those with a multitude of sensory or physical disabilities (Corbett, 1992). The student with emotional needs may be supported by pastoral tutors, counsellors or educational psychologists and, if it is necessary to purchase support services, the costs may result in a skeleton service that amounts to crisis management.

However, some students trying to grapple with difficulties and tensions may appear to be managing adequately. The very coping process, of trying to restore and maintain equilibrium, may mask the complexities and high levels of anxiety

that the individual is experiencing. For the already stressed tutor, it will undoubtedly be easier to recognize, and deal with, those who are showing overt signs of difficulty, such as acting out in class and inappropriate behaviour. The underlying difficulties of the 'coper' may go wholly unrecognised. Such a scenario presents a real challenge to the concept of equal opportunity for all and brings an added dimension to the current debate about the nature of inclusive education. In focusing upon Asian girls, this study attempts to illustrate the complexity of inclusive education within FE, in an attempt to widen the debate beyond merely responding to disability. The ideological concepts regarding inclusive education (for example, Booth, 1988) may lead to a danger of overlooking the often 'invisible' and unique needs of this group of women, who may not be part of the rhetoric of equal opportunities for all.

With these issues in mind, the research questions and hypothesis were formulated.

The Research Questions:

1. What is the nature of stress experienced by Asian female students in the further education college setting?
2. What factors cause most stress for Asian young women in college?
3. How are symptoms of stress displayed and recognized?
4. What are the different coping mechanisms used to reduce stress?
5. Do the coping strategies employed by Asian young women mask underlying difficulties?
6. Are there differences between staff and student perceptions about what constitutes stress for Asian young women?

7. Are there differences between staff and student perceptions about what constitutes effective coping strategies used by Asian young women?

The Hypothesis:

The stress and coping experiences of Asian young women in the further education setting are largely *invisible* to college staff.

Chapter two will give a more detailed overview of the relevant literature and will endeavour to set the research questions and hypothesis in context.

PART TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The review of literature relevant to this study is to be presented in three chapters. **Chapter two** sets the broad context, **chapter three** presents the theoretical models from which the data is to be viewed, and **chapter four** outlines the philosophical and epistemological stance to be taken. The literature presented and discussed, aims to inform the methodology and the ways in which the subject area is to be explored.

CHAPTER TWO

The Contextual Background

Introduction

Chapter two forms the most substantial part of the literature review and deals with key themes. The chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part focuses upon the general picture within further education, and outlines the recent changes in funding, managerial structure, market forces and the inevitable changes within the institutional culture itself. The changing college environment and its effects upon staff is also discussed, including the perceived decline of the professional role, competing tensions and increased levels of stress. The literature presented then examines the history of special educational needs within FE, and the development of learning support. The review looks at aspects of the ongoing debate about inclusive education, spurred on by Tomlinson in the Further Education Funding Council Report (1996), and its implications for the student with special needs within the current context of FE. The literature examines the complexities and notions of what constitutes a 'special educational need' and whether all individual needs, including emotional ones, are visible and fit neatly into the traditional 'inclusive' college community. Chapter two goes on to examine recent papers that discuss the notion of empowerment, choice and independence. Finally, in order to put my own professional role in context, the place of the educational psychologist within FE is outlined.

The second part of chapter two discusses documents that catalogue the background and history of South Asian, and in particular Muslim, young women in Western society. More specifically, recent literature that examines the experience of Asian young women in family, community and further education settings is outlined, including the stresses of bi-cultural living and coping

strategies used. Papers that view Asian girls as being part of a 'high-risk' group, in terms of depression and suicide attempts, and the way the media presents their plight, are juxtaposed with papers that demonstrate the more positive aspects of their lives. This section goes on to examine literature that explores the match between student and teacher perspectives, and the effects of differences in perceptions upon the lives of Asian young women. Finally, suggestions for 'ways forward' are presented.

The College Context

The Changing Environment of Further Education

As part of the process of examining student stress, it is important to consider the context of the college environment. The last decade has seen rapid changes in further education. During the 1970s and 1980s, colleges became 'responsive' to adults and school leavers who previously would have entered into the labour market. The new style FE college offered a complex package of vocational and academic courses (Green and Lucas, 1999). Some Local Education Authorities attempted to establish cooperation between schools and sixth-form centres, whilst others merged schools into sixth form colleges. Similarly, sixth forms and FE colleges formed tertiary colleges, thus providing adult education.

The 1988 Education Reform Act (DES) began the process of removing FE from the control of the Local Education Authorities. Responsibility for finance, management and college development was delegated to 'Governing Bodies' (McGinty and Fish, 1993). In 1992, the Further and Higher Education Act (DFE, 1992) brought increased autonomy from the LEAs and, since 1993, responsibility for the availability and quality of FE has rested with the Further Education Funding Council. College funding is now dependent upon fulfilling performance targets and student retention, as well as successful course completion. If students 'drop out', financial 'claw-back' will result (Randle and Brady, 1997). Colleges

also have to satisfy the FEFC of quality assurance measures and, where they fail to meet new government standards, funding will be cut (Kelly, *Financial Times*, 2001). The *Financial Times* goes on to quote Margaret Hodge, government minister for lifelong learning, as saying

“We will not tolerate or prop up failure.” (Page 6, 11.7.01)

Such developments have brought with them a ‘new managerialism’, a package of ideas, techniques and styles (Pollitt, 1990; Flynn, 1993; Farnham & Horton, 1993). The government now treats post-16 training and education as an open market (Kelly, 2001). This approach includes strict financial management and budgetary controls, the efficient use of resources and an emphasis on productivity, the use of quantitative performance indicators and the development of a consumer-driven approach and accountability. New managerialism may use individualised contracts and appraisal systems, with the underlying premise that the manager has ‘the right to manage’, to ensure value for money (Randle & Brady, 1997). However, the FEFC (1997a) found that over half of colleges were operating at a loss, placing an even greater strain upon the college system.

Green and Lucas (1999) argue that the dramatic changes within the FE sector in recent years has resulted in crisis. They suggest that the crisis has four dimensions: the distinctive role of FE colleges has been squeezed between the growth of sixth forms in schools, the role of the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and universities; the FEFCs funding mechanism has resulted in the quality of the learning experience being marginalized by financial considerations; the model is over-centralised and is not responsive to regional needs; and the strategic role has drifted. Green and Lucas conclude that the FE sector has no clear institutional identity and that it is experiencing a crisis that demands ‘serious soul-searching about quality’ (page 227).

McDonald and Lucas (2001) examined the impact of FEFC funding on 14 FE settings. They found that, although colleges were learning to live with the FEFC regime and some incorporation difficulties had been alleviated, there were continuing worries about

“the growing bureaucratic demands, the poor morale and the lack of

professional development opportunities for the FE teacher". (Page 224)

The prime concern for staff is to provide 'quality educational opportunities for students', although the emphasis on business systems is alien to many tutors (Dearing, 1994). There seems to be direct conflict between the goals and values of the professional paradigm and the managerial paradigm. Randle and Brady (1997) interviewed 400 full-time lecturers in FE. They found that the majority (85%) of the respondents believed that college management did not share the same educational values as the general staff. Furthermore, lecturers felt that the drive to increase student numbers caused a dilution of the quality of educational provision. Randle and Brady (1997) comment

"Students were being recruited for courses for which they were ill-equipped and (that) many were being retained on courses despite near certainty of failure." (Page 233)

In this study, the perceptions of college staff about the nature of 'quality' differed from management staff. It seemed that management viewed 'quality' as 'conforming to requirements', which reduced professional control. The study also found that, to achieve efficiency, control was given to managers rather than tutors. Shain (2000) also found that tutors below the upper management levels lacked control and were frequently bullied, even though there was a 'language' of partnership, inclusivity and collaboration.

The decline of the professional role is a theme that is mirrored in Burrage and Stewart's paper (1990), which discusses the perceived sources of staff stress in FE. It seems that there is a feeling of powerlessness as policies come and go. The professional skill of college tutors is appraised by managers who may or may not have equitable teaching skills themselves. The 'flexible learning' approach means that students are spending more time in independent study using pre-packaged material and computer technology; a shift in focus away from teaching and classroom interaction. Furthermore, the 'enterprise culture' and its emphasis on science, technology and vocationalism has resulted in anxiety for tutors whose subjects do not easily lend themselves to this approach. Courses have been 'modularised' and assessment requirements have changed; the length and organisation of the college year has undergone changes; there have been pay

restraints as well as alterations to the conditions of service (NFER/NATFHE, 1994).

Green and Lucas (1999) maintain that the number of teaching hours for FE staff has increased, as have additional administrative tasks and the amount of personal tutoring. Furthermore, as unit costs have been driven down, class sizes have increased and course hours have been cut, resulting in teachers having more groups and a greater number of students.

It is within this setting that FE lecturers are reporting increased levels of stress. Stead et al. (1995) found that full-time staff reported working an average 43-hour week, against a contracted 30 hours, and that there were high levels of anxiety and depression. Inability to provide quality teaching was a major factor in producing high stress levels with 43 percent of staff considered to be at borderline or clinical levels of anxiety. Kirsch (1994), reports on the findings of a National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) survey, where lecturers

“feel that they are drowning under the sheer weight of work and expectations in the new FE climate.” (Page 15)

The report, based on responses from 112 FE colleges, found that overload and stress were seen as a major part of the college lecturer's life. Growing administrative tasks were the biggest cause of increased workload, as well as the introduction of new courses (such as National Vocational Qualifications and General National Vocational Qualifications). Stressors included growing numbers of students and larger classes, with the accompanying demands for student counselling. There was a feeling that many more students entering FE were unprepared for the experience and that mixed ability groups often meant that student needs were not fully met. The survey found that there was a growing problem of non-attendance without the assistance of support services. Kirsch went on to say that

“the combination of students (and lecturers) in need of support and overcrowded environments sometimes led to outbreaks of violence and other behavioural problems.” (Page 16)

McDonald and Lucas' (2001) more recent survey of 14 colleges confirms the NATFHE findings. They discovered growing pressure upon staff to cope with FEFC data requirements. Teachers were expected to deliver the curriculum by teaching fewer hours whilst providing more resource-based, individualised learning. McDonald and Lucas found high sickness and absenteeism in a number of colleges, as well as an over-reliance on part-time staff, making for poor continuity.

Gibbons' (1998) study indicated that lecturers who had experienced organisational change reported higher measures of stress. Male and May's (1998) research found that although there was no evidence of heightened stress for learner support co-ordinators in FE colleges, there was evidence that excessive workloads appeared to lead to 'exhausted emotional health'. Furthermore, 'buffers' such as status, autonomy, good relationships with colleagues and line managers, satisfaction with support services and the feeling of being worthwhile were often lacking or deficient for FE support staff. Burchill (1998) found that funding constraints, increased workloads and decreased pay have put considerable strain on relations within the FE sector, and Hodge (1998) found evidence of low staff moral, allegations of sleaze, bullying and financial mismanagement.

The FE environment is, it seems, in a complicated state of flux. The management is increasingly faced with pressures to enhance their institutions' positions in the marketplace and to move forward in the drive for efficiency, effectiveness and quality outcomes (Barton, 1998a). The culture of the college is attempting to respond to many diverse demands, which include: the external demands of local and central government; the internal demands of students and staff; and the restrictions of resource availability. Such demands bring competing tensions and an often-disparate internal college environment. Moreover, the FE college is set within the broader context of the local community where it works to meet the needs of varied local social groups. Busher (1998) points out that the differing contexts influence the internal decision-making process. He cites Willis' (1977) example showing that the location of a school, within a particular community with a particular socio-economic profile, will have considerable influence on

both the academic performance of its students and on the school's relationship with students and parents.

Thus, the further education student enters an environment of tension and anxiety where college tutors themselves feel professionally threatened and overloaded, and where market forces have created the potential for turmoil and disparity. As McDonald and Lucas (2001) point out, although New Labour emphasises the need for social inclusion, widening participation and regional planning and collaboration, the current funding mechanism seems to be at odds with the emerging agenda. Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) suggest that current policies and the 'uncertain young people' in the FE sector are 'worlds apart' (page 64). They argue that the 'cut-throat' commercial relationships, the discipline and exigencies of the FEFC funding regime and the government's complex curricular and assessment structure, handle young people according to a hierarchical 'economy of student worth' and fail to 'understand or appreciate the risks, fears or desires of youth'. (Page 63)

McDonald and Lucas' (2001) findings echoed those of Ball et al. They found that whilst tutors welcomed government rhetoric about collaborative planning (outlined in the White Paper, *Learning to Succeed*, Department for Education and Employment, 1999), and were committed to principles of lifelong and inclusive learning, they had grave concerns about the funding mechanism and its apparent mismatch with government policy.

It is in this setting that the 'inclusive' education debate is taking place. The funding mechanism provides individually targeted funding and makes colleges accountable for how the money is spent. Those students with 'officially recognised' special educational needs have resources safeguarded for them. However, performance indicators and competition in the market place have resulted in raised entry standards as well as the tendency for students to be selected on the grounds of their potential (McDonald and Lucas, 2001). On the other hand, the categories of 'deprivation, special needs and race' (Ball et al., 2000, page 57) provide opportunities for niche marketing and course-filling. This approach challenges the concept of inclusive education and is in danger of

disregarding the wider learning environment. The review of literature will now turn to these issues.

Special Educational Needs and Inclusive Education

In order to put the current debate about special educational needs in context, it is helpful to briefly overview the history of the term. The Education Act of 1944 defined special educational needs as coming from physical or mental disability. Compulsory medical examination and/or intelligence testing invariably meant assigning the child to one of the statutory categories of handicap. As Florian (1998) points out, the 'system' of special education developed largely in response to some form of exclusionary practice. The difficulties created by enrolling previously excluded children into the school system when compulsory schooling came into being in the 1870s, created such a strain within schools that a 'special' system was created. Children with difficulties were usually taught in separate schools or classes. In 1976, an Education Act declared that where practicable children should be educated in ordinary schools. The Warnock report (DES, 1978) and the subsequent 1981 Education Act (DES, 1981) shifted the emphasis from categorisation of handicap to a general category of 'special educational needs'. This umbrella term included those with physical and sensory disabilities; those with mild or significant learning difficulties; those with specific learning difficulties (dyslexic or dyspraxic) as well as individuals with differing degrees of behavioural and emotional difficulty. The 1993 Education Act (DES, 1993) amended and extended the moves towards integration for those with special educational needs. More recently, the 'Tomlinson Report' (FEFC, 1996) focused upon further education and aimed to examine the provision for those with learning difficulties and /or disabilities and to say whether the requirements of the 1992 DFE Act were being satisfied. Tomlinson discusses the concept of 'inclusive education' and the need to

“avoid a viewpoint which locates the difficulty or deficit with the student and focus instead on the capacity of the educational institution to understand and respond to the individual learner's requirement.”

(Page 4)

In these terms, 'inclusive learning' is about the match between the needs of the learner and the demands of the course, with the learner's requirement being the starting point. It is about redesigning the provision itself, considering teaching methods, considering the students' pre-existing skills and knowledge, their aptitudes and interests as well as their current and future needs (Florian, 1997).

Inclusive education is, however, operating within an environment where the targeted funding mechanism makes colleges more accountable for how the money is spent. As Dee (1999) asserts, the FEFC (1998) made it clear that support must be given directly to the student, leaving the wider inclusive learning environment potentially exposed to funding deficit. Dee points out the necessity for a model of provision that recognises the interactive nature of learning and the subsequent funding needs of both the individual and the institution.

The FE sector is battling not only with funding constraints but also with philosophical debate about the nature of inclusive education. Booth, Ainscow and Dyson (1997) define the terms 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' from education as

"respectively the processes of increasing and reducing the participation of students in the cultures, curricula and communities of local mainstream schools." (Page 337)

Booth and his contemporaries regard inclusion and exclusion as processes rather than events, being concerned with the reduction of exclusionary pressures. They go on to say that the 'inclusive' school is

"an elusive ideal, existing when no difference between students or their communities is devalued." (Page 338)

Oliver (1992b), in his rejoinder to Soder (1989, 1991) and Booth's (1991) discussions about the experience of disability (whether it is 'real' or socially constructed) argues that such debate is 'intellectual masturbation', divorced from any reference to direct experiences of disability. Oliver goes on to say that the success of integration at an ideological level has made it almost impossible for it to be examined critically. It seems that the ongoing ideological debate about inclusive education (for example, Booth, Ainscow and Dyson, 1997; Booth, 1988), whilst necessary and progressive, is in danger of overlooking the

individual learner's requirement, since it seems to be more concerned with the overarching concept of inclusivity.

If 'inclusion purists' focus upon the 'good of the whole' and the furtherance of ideological policy, then the possibility of specifically addressing individual needs, differences and everyday struggles becomes remote. Corbett (1997) puts it this way

“ We have to respond to the world as we find it, not to a theoretical version of what might be possible.” (Page 56)

Those whose needs are not even on the agenda have a slim chance of receiving equal opportunity in their further education experiences. In the current market environment, where cost-effectiveness and observable success are inherent parts of the further education management plan, those whose needs are not easily recognised and not easily met, may fit uncomfortably in the overall 'special educational needs package'. Corbett (1997) suggests that where 'inclusion rights activists' aim to promote a more powerful and cohesive identity, only the collective values are promoted and individual difficulties are ignored. Corbett goes on to ask who owns inclusive rights and whose values count? In the context of a multi-ethnic environment where students come from homes that represent many different value systems and cultural practices, who establishes the values that form the basis of the inclusive FE college? It is vital that differences, whether in terms of disability or culture, are not viewed in terms of a 'deficit', that is, as different to those who manage the system and provide the educational rhetoric, and therefore to be viewed as 'poor individuals' (Oliver, 1992b).

The students whose needs are not easily recognised, whose values are not easily encompassed within the inclusive college system and who may have little chance of expressing what their needs are, enter an already complex setting where the ideological debate continues to bubble. It is to those who have hidden or 'invisible' emotional needs that this review now turns.

Emotional and Invisible Needs in Further Education: Counting the Cost

Young people in the college setting may have one or a combination of difficulties, differing in degree and complexity. Some students arrive in further education with a long history of support, accompanied by a legal document or 'statement' of need. Staff are given lengthy documentation that clearly defines needs and appropriate methods of support within an inclusive environment. Other young people arrive without ever having had their individual needs formally recognised, perhaps because there are no immediately observable difficulties. Within this group are those with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Rees (1995) reports on 'the growing tide' of such students within the further education context. She sees them as disturbing rather than disturbed. They may be lonely, isolated, or have difficulties in making relationships, or they may be aggressive and disruptive. Hurst (1999a) suggests that students with mental health problems pose the most dilemmas for tutors since many feel ill-prepared and lacking in the special skills needed to work with this group. Rees goes on to say that these students do not necessarily come to lecturers' attention because they do not cause obvious problems of discipline during the educational process. The responsibility for these students often lies with tutors and managers who, as Rees points out, are subject to an ever-increasing administrative burden and therefore adopt a crisis management approach, which ignores emotional difficulties until it becomes impossible to do so. The 'resource-based' learning and self-directed approach often results in students being left to fend for themselves with little direct contact with supportive staff. The student who loses interest and motivation will quickly become a statistic in FE colleges 'loss' column (Rees, 1995).

The student with 'hidden' needs is as much a part of the culture of inclusive education as the student with more obvious, immediately recognisable needs, yet those with emotional and behavioural difficulties, including those with mental health problems, were named by Tomlinson (FEFC, 1996) as being under-

represented in FE. As Rees (1995) asserts, there is little evidence that FE colleges as a whole are addressing the needs of those with emotional and behavioural difficulties in a formalised way. The government 'green paper' (Department for Education and Employment, 1997) focuses upon the need to collect information about the experiences of young people once they have left school, to help schools and colleges prepare them for adult life. It asks whether there are gaps in the current provision that could be filled through better information and co-ordination. The 'invisibility' of some young people with emotional difficulties suggests that there are indeed gaps. If they themselves are unable to identify and make known their needs, it is a difficult task for the supporting staff in colleges to identify such individual and hidden needs.

Inner city students with emotional difficulties are highly likely to have complicated lives. Wilkinson (1990) paints a picture that includes those from economically deprived areas and those who come from families who may already be caring for siblings with disability or learning difficulties. The lives of these young people may be perplexing and entangled, yet opportunities for discussing their difficulties in the college setting may be few and far between. Indeed, they may have a distinct wish not to discuss or reveal personal issues, but rather to remain private. When there are particularly pressing needs at home and time out of college is needed, college staff may remain unaware of home circumstances and unknowingly compound the situation by taking a 'disciplinary' role regarding attendance or completion of assignments.

Those with emotional difficulties, whether the symptoms are overt or invisible, may require large amounts of time from skilled, trained staff who are readily available, and able to listen appropriately and be pro-active for those who are not able to ask for help. Tomlinson emphasised the need for teachers to take time to listen but, as Dee (1999) points out, this presents a challenge for college staff as direct contact with students is diminishing. As Kennedy (FEFC, 1997) found, access to good provision is a 'lottery' for under-represented learners. The widening participation committee set up in 1994, chaired by Kennedy, found that some communities had their needs carefully and comprehensively mapped and identified, whilst others had not. The committee's report went on to reveal that

participation in education and training was dependent upon where you lived and, although initial advice and guidance was generally available, the student had to be aware of what was available and have the self-confidence and ability to seek it out.

The term 'special needs' seems to include a diverse range of learners, yet some are more easily and obviously catered for than others. Spending time in 'being available' to listen may be seen as the job of the 'carers' in the learning support department, and often leaves those lecturers with low status but high responsibility (Corbett, 1992). If senior management teams are enthusiastic about abandoning discrete provision, it may be more about cutting costs than reflecting a philosophical stance and fundamental belief (Dee and Corbett, 1994).

'Traditional' and 'officially recognised' special needs or students in need of learning support often bring with them financial incentives for colleges, whereas emotional needs are difficult to identify and may be all but invisible. There may be no real evidence of individual education plans, self-directed learning programmes and eventual successful completion of a course.

Corbett (2001) suggests that there is a subtle distinction between equity and entitlement. Those students formally labelled as having special educational needs are seen to be entitled to allocated resources. However, those looking for equity of provision, usually those outside the special needs system, are often reliant upon, 'humility, careful listening and mutual respect' (page 115). There may be no obvious 'value for money' and in this context, providing equal opportunity may cost too much. Hallahan (1998) posits that students with the best financial backing are most likely to get places at colleges where pressure is placed upon the management to make 'efficiency gains'.

Armstrong and Barton (1999) suggest that the 'needs' discourse is disempowering since it focuses attention away from the possibility of individuals, groups and communities bringing about change for themselves. In the college context, it is often the 'special needs' agenda that specifies support, rather than the system enabling the student to take their own ameliorative action.

This raises the difficult question of the nature of empowerment and it is these issues that the literature review will now explore.

Empowerment and Independence

Those with special educational needs do not come from a homogenous group, and those with symptoms of stress and emotional difficulties have a unique value system and set of beliefs. To empower an individual to make their own, informed, choices, the system of support must take into account the unique experiences of that individual. To be fully aware of the possible choices a young person may have in dealing with their stresses, those supporting that young person must have a clear understanding about how she or he views the world. The supporting staff are unlikely to hold identical values and beliefs as the student. Suggesting a course of action that the advisor thinks is sensible would be unlikely to empower the troubled student, unless it fits within the student's construction of reality and what they see as possible and achievable

Dee and Corbett (1994) emphasise that, if individual learners make choices which conflict with professional opinion, then this is the challenge of empowerment and what it means in reality. In practice, the range of possible choices may conflict with the overall aims of college management; for example, the student may choose to opt out of courses or repeat a year, or choose to continue against advice and fail the course, all of which costs money without any measurable success. In the view of Dee and Corbett (1994), it may be easier to accept the more promising learners and reject those who cost too much for little return.

In the second part of chapter two, literature that examines the unique experience of South Asian girls in FE will be presented. The notions of independence that Western *individualistic* societies hold and the *collectivistic* value systems of Eastern cultures (Triandis, 1994) are juxtaposed. It is useful here to focus upon the drive towards independence and choice for those with learning difficulties and disabilities. The appropriateness, or otherwise, of college initiatives to

promote independence skills for Asian young people with learning difficulties is one issue currently being explored by *Skill*, The National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (Liz Maudslay, 2001, policy director). Corbett (1989) maintains that one of the characteristic features of the independence curriculum is a move towards autonomy. The move towards independent thinking, self-expression and achievement are, it seems, key components of European-derived cultures (Triandis, 1994). Thus young people with severe disabilities are encouraged to be self-sufficient and independent, when in reality being able to live with parents, for example, may prove a source of liberation and stimulus (Corbett, 1989), since the family may have a deeper understanding of needs. Corbett goes on to suggest that

“The interdependence of family networks can provide a quality of life which a bleak and lonely independence might lack.” (Page, 157)

These issues are relevant to Asian young women in FE since there is the danger that any support offered to Asian girls, with symptoms of stress or emotional difficulties, will almost inevitably be based upon Westernised notions of independence, delivered under the guise of equal opportunities.

The current support structures in place in FE settings are usually centred on the learning support staff and those with responsibility for pastoral care. If students do not present observable difficulties, then the likelihood is they will have to seek out support for themselves or rely upon the skill of course tutors to recognise their needs. In order to put my own position in context, the literature review will now examine the role of educational psychologists in further education in the UK.

Educational Psychologists in Further Education

Educational psychology services in England and Wales differ greatly in the amount of time they give to involvement in further education. A report by HMI on services in England, 1988-1989 (DES, 1990), stated that the majority of educational psychology services provided ‘only very limited support’ in the FE sector. A few services made a conscious decision not to work in FE owing to

their staffing difficulties. Stratford and Zworick-Southall (1985) found little evidence historically of EP involvement in the FE sector and little or no uniformity between authorities. A more recent survey of educational psychology services in England and Wales (Gill, 1997) found that, of the 103 that returned questionnaires, 48 services had 'responsibility' for work in further education, 14 worked on an 'ad hoc' basis and 41 EPSs did not have a specific role in FE. Those who did work in colleges outlined their roles as mainly concerned with assessment for specific learning difficulties and examination dispensations.

In April 1993, when FE establishments became financially independent from local authorities and allocation of funding became the responsibility of the Further Education Funding Council, colleges were able to develop in whatever direction they judged most likely to bring success (Patten, 1992). Fitcher and Carroll (1994) noted that educational psychology services that had previously been involved in further education largely withdrew their initiatives. The decision whether or not to purchase the services of an educational psychologist lies wholly with the colleges themselves. The college perspective of what constitutes a special educational need, and budget constraints, makes for a diverse pattern of EP involvement nation-wide. Fitcher and Carroll (1994) outline barriers, from a college perspective, to working effectively with educational psychology services. They point out that within the college there may be little knowledge of corporate or individual skills of EPSs. There may be a strong sense of self-sufficiency and a variety of attitudes about inclusive education as well as a mismatch of views between learning support staff and college staff as a whole. The large numbers of staff and students and the complexities of the college curriculum often result in restricted access to professionals and agencies outside the college system.

It seems to be largely a matter of luck as to whether a student is able to have access to the services of an educational psychologist, with or without a statement of special educational needs. For students who do have a 'statement', the EP is likely to play a key role in the assessment of future needs when a 'Transition Plan', outlined in the Code of Practice (DfE, 1994), is discussed between the

ages of 14 and 16. For those whose needs are hidden from view, displaying only 'surface symptoms' of unexplained absences, 'quietness', falling standards of work or inability to meet deadlines, or for those who may not be giving any hint of underlying need, the chance of access to an educational psychologist is remote. One county educational psychologist described students with the traditional label of 'emotional and behavioural difficulties' as being seen as either 'sad' or 'bad' (Rees, 1995). The former were those who are disturbed in some way, lonely, or isolated, but who do not come to the lecturers' attention because they do not cause obvious problems of discipline. The latter were referred to as 'disturbing' because their emotional state manifests itself in behavioural problems of aggression or disruption.

So where does the future lie for Educational Psychologists in FE? Futchter and Carroll (1994) point out that, for a college to buy-in EP services, those services must be presented as an attractive proposition. Since the colleges are 'buying-in' the services, they may view themselves as having ownership and therefore a right to a 'say' in the way the psychologist practices. As Lewis (1996) sees it, the level of purchase may not necessarily reflect the level of need. Lewis believes the needs of the individual should be the primary focus of concern for the EP, whilst Harrison (1995) suggests that psychology services need to market themselves in terms of their ability to promote quality, curriculum-based assessment as well as promoting whole-college support. It could be argued that without at least a point of reference to an educational psychologist, the student with 'invisible' special needs is denied a possible source of help.

The Historical and Social Context of South Asian Young Women

Asian Immigration to the UK

In order to explore the complex experiences of Asian girls in further education, it is important to outline their historical and social roots. For the purposes of this

study 'Asian' will be taken to include those from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. This is a far from homogenous group, not only because of differences in country of origin, but also because of the underpinnings of diverse cultural practices and religions. The three main religions are Sikh, Hindu and Muslim, with the majority of people from India being Sikh and Hindu, whilst those from Pakistan and Bangladesh are, in the main, Muslim.

Before the Second World War, there were few Asians living in the UK. Desai (1963) estimates the number to be about 15,000. Amongst this group were those who came as personal attendants to their British employers or were soldiers or sailors in the British Navy or Army. Some decided to remain in the UK rather than return home to possible unemployment, others were doctors and students who stayed on at the end of their studies (Rose and Deakin, 1969). During the 1960s further opportunities for employment arose, for example in the growing industries of the North of England and clothes manufacturing in London. After 1962, a 'work voucher' had to be obtained from the British High Commissioner in the home country before immigration could take place; this was followed by Acts of Parliament that tightened immigration even further (Ghuman, 1999; Fryer, 1984). For some, immigration became a means of acquiring status as well as financial gain (Shah, 1998). In 1971 an Immigration Act ended virtually all primary immigration from the Commonwealth countries and only close relatives were considered for entry (Ghuman, 1999). In 1991 it was estimated that Asians from the Indian sub-continent, living in the UK, numbered nearly one and a half million (Owen, 1992).

Many of the first generation immigrants held on to hopes that one day they would return to their home country. Families became fragmented as some members remained in their country of origin waiting for the financial means to immigrate, whilst others in the UK wanted to stay to earn enough money to improve living conditions back home (Shah, 1998; Ghuman, 1999). For some, living in the UK was a complicated and difficult experience. The vast majority settled in inner-city areas where they rebuilt their own religious and social institutions that enabled them to retain home traditions and social and cultural continuity. Cultural communities or enclaves were established where shared

understanding formed the basis for physical and psychological security (Desai, 1963).

As Ghuman (1999) points out, the immigrants were entering a post-colonial Britain where there was the premise of superiority of whites over Asians. They experienced racial prejudice in employment, housing, education and in all walks of life (Rex and Tomlinson, 1979). Previous research (Dhaya, 1972; Anwar, 1978; Shaw, 1989; Singh, 1988; Desai, 1963) indicates that first generation Asians endeavoured to adapt to their situation by remaining within their cultural and religious groups. These studies infer that they had little contact with the indigenous whites, mainly due to the lack of English language skills, unfamiliarity with social mores and the need to retain their own sense of identity. A more recent study (Bhatti, 1999), found that Asian parents felt themselves to be living in 'two worlds'. The concept of 'acculturation' ('the process by which immigrants adopt the way of life of their host society', Ghuman, 1999, page 66) will be discussed further in chapter three but the aforementioned research suggests that first generation Asian immigrants employed, in the main, a 'separation' mode of living and working in the UK. A crucial facet of acculturation is the reaction of the host society, which in the case of post-colonial Britain was distinctly prejudicial and discriminatory.

Moving on from the first generation of immigrants, the review will now turn to the experiences of first and second generation Asians, and in particular Asian young women.

Second and Third Generation Asian Adolescents: the Bi-Cultural Context

Whilst adolescence need not necessarily include a period of storm and stress (Coleman and Hendry, 1990), it is nevertheless a time for exploring personal identities, including decisions whether to accept or reject the values, beliefs and traditions of parents. For Asian adolescents there are

“additional difficulties which arise because of the way in which the

beliefs, values and social attitudes of their families often contrast with those of the host society. For this reason their social and psychological development is likely to be more difficult than that of their white peers.” (Ghuman, 1999, page 33)

If, as Weinreich (1979) views it, they form a conception of themselves which is neither approved by their parents nor by their white indigenous peers they may have to withstand considerable psychological conflict. However, a notion of ‘culture clash’, having to choose between East and West, is, as Ballard (1979) comments, a gross oversimplification. Ballard goes on to say that implicit in the idea of ‘culture conflict’ are ethnocentric assumptions that young Asians would like to ‘be like us’, if only their parents would allow it. Bhatti (1999) suggests that many Asian children are in charge of their own destiny since their parents know little about their daily lives. The Asian adolescent is, however, caught up in the dichotomy of the home environment, which stresses the importance of the family and kinship (termed by South Asians as *bradari*), a traditional role for girls and women and adherence to the community’s religious values and traditions, and the environment of British society which values individual autonomy, gender equality and a secular outlook (Ghuman, 1999). As Haw and Hanifa (1998) put it,

“One system seeks individual autonomy by which the educational process invites young people to think and act for themselves within society, whilst the other attempts to maintain a strong sense of community and family solidarity within a religious framework.” (Page 70 - 71)

Stopes-Roe and Cochrane’s (1990) study reinforces this view. They found that Asians value conformity more, and self-direction less. They point out that this difference is considerably more pronounced in the older generation of the Asian population. The cross-cultural psychological notions of individualism and collectivism will be explored further in chapter three.

For second and third generation Asian adolescents the process of acculturation is on a continuum. At one end is minimum adjustment (*accommodation*) and at the other end is complete absorption into the host society (*assimilation*). Ghuman’s (1999) recent review of empirical studies in this area, including his own (Ghuman, 1994; 1995; 1996), indicate that the majority of Asian young people prefer the ‘acculturation’ or integration mode of adaptation (Modood *et al.*, 1997;

Hutnik, 1991) rather than, for example, assimilation, marginalisation or separation. Ghuman's investigations in the UK revealed that girls show more willingness for acculturation than do boys, and that Hindu young people are more in favour of taking up English values than are Muslims. Sikh young people come somewhere in-between. Ghuman qualifies his findings when he goes on to state that the teenagers do not want to reject all aspects of their parents' culture and are keen to retain key elements of it. This aspect was also found to be of importance in Weinreich's (1979) study. Weinreich concluded that few are likely to reject their ethnic roots but will redefine themselves and adapt to and incorporate some of the cultural values of white Western society. Ballard (1979) maintains that most young Asians try to avoid open conflict with their parents, not because they are physically fearful of them, but rather they feel they should obey their parents and honour the family.

Asian adolescents of today are then in a 'half-way' or 'in-between' generation (Taylor and Hegarty, 1985; Taylor, 1976). Their parents' lives may be increasingly exposed as being remote from their own experiences of life, in the community, at school, college or in employment. Bhatti's (1999) study, of 50 secondary-aged Asian pupils, confirmed that teachers and parents found it impossible to comprehend the confusing world of Asian children, since neither had experienced life in quite the same way. Bhatti suggests that British Asian adolescents are in a transitional phase and are carving out a separate identity for themselves. She maintains that, if they are marginalized or stereotyped, Asian young people may withdraw into themselves.

Several researchers (for example, Bhatti, 1999; Ghuman, 1999; Haw, 1998) have focused upon the importance of family honour or *izzat* and the continuation of traditional roles within the family unit and larger Asian community. The discussion will now turn to Asian girls since their role in maintaining family *izzat* is of unique importance.

Gender Roles: The Asian Young Woman's Experience

The gender roles and behaviour of first generation Asians, that is, those born in the Indian sub-continent, were well defined and practised. Helweg and Helweg (1990) suggest that there is a tendency by first generation Asians to equate individualism with selfishness, and traditions upheld are very often about promoting the good of the family. One example of this is the system of arranged marriages. In the home countries, marriage was a family concern rather than a private matter, with the women's role mainly confined to household duties. Education for women was viewed in a less favourable light (Ghuman, 1999). The role of the male was to provide financial support and stability and to be the protector of women. Muslim women in particular have traditionally been the

“appointed site of familial honour and shame and the representatives of the public face of the society's apparent commitment to its faith... they are the custodians of the religious beliefs, even though... it has been the men who have been the interpreters of norms, values and practices according to that belief. Women, whether they have wished it or not, have been required to reflect the religious commitment of the group in their attire and behaviour as well as in most aspects of their lives.” (Afshar, 1994, page 129)

Ballard (1979) writes that girls are often under stricter surveillance than boys, for fear of too much freedom spoiling their reputation and thus damaging the chances of making a 'good' marriage. Ballard goes on to say that many girls complain about the dual standard of morality that allows their brothers a great deal more freedom. It seems that, as the Asian young woman moves towards a more individualistic, Westernised way of life (for example, choosing her marriage partner), she is at risk of weakening the networks of kinship in which her parents operate. Hawe (1998) examines the difficulty for Muslim feminists, and points out that such women are faced with a hostile host community and a patriarchal kin community.

Shah (1998) notes that men have traditionally undertaken the interpretation of Islamic teachings, and, although Islam commends plurality, diversity and equality, the position of women has been decentred and relegated to 'otherness'. Shah's point is that the patriarchal control over the interpretation and

dissemination of religious knowledge has contributed to condemning women to deprivations. It is interesting to note that Ellis (1991) and Archer (1996) found that it is the girls who are most Westernised who have the most problems.

Talbani and Hasanali (2000) examined the social and cultural expectations of adolescent females belonging to various south Asian immigrant groups in Canada. Their study showed that gender roles were maintained through gender segregation, control over social activities of girls and arranged marriages. The study also found that South Asian girls perceived high social cost attached to protest and dissent and, therefore, they accepted the prevalent conditions and expected to change the social situation only gradually.

There is evidence (Ghuman, 1994; Drury, 1991) to suggest that, although many of the inequalities between Asian girls and boys have subsided, parents do not treat their offspring on equal terms. Girls are given less freedom and choice than boys when selecting friends and clothes, seeking jobs away from home and socialising with friends. Ghuman's (1994) study of Asian adolescents found that over three-quarters of the sample thought girls were not treated in the same way as boys. The investigation revealed that the young people found Hindu and Sikh parents to be more liberal than Muslim parents.

P. Oliver (1992) conducted an ethnographic study of Hindu students in an FE college. He argues that there exists a specifically Hindu perception of the world. Young Hindu women in his study considered that they should adopt a more active, participatory role in society and not accept traditional gender roles uncritically. Oliver found that Hindu students were aware of social pressure within the Hindu community to conform to traditional gender roles.

Whilst there are differences between the experiences of young women from the three main religious groups, it is clear that there is also a range of acculturation experiences. Drury's (1991) study of Sikh girls and the maintenance of their ethnic culture found that it was possible to identify different categories of maintenance and non-adherence. There were those who maintained Sikh traits in deference to their parents and those who did so of their own volition. Drury

found that some young Sikhs tended to confine certain traditions to specific contexts whilst others maintained them in all situations. Where traditions had been abandoned, Drury found examples both of parental consent and of the girls disregarding their parent's wishes. Drury concluded that there was very little evidence of overt inter-generational conflict and where girls openly went against their parent's wishes they mostly did so 'in secret', thus avoiding confrontation.

It is clear, then, that the position of young Asian women in Western society is densely complicated. The complexities inherent in the emergence of ethnicity for Asian girls are bound up with notions about in-group belonging and the experience of exclusion from the mainstream. Since the research itself has been carried out using Westernised methods and approaches, and has been carried out in settings where post-colonial prejudices may have left their mark, it is vital that stereotypical inferences are not made from reading the available material. However, it is also clear that the everyday lives of Asian girls are subject to extra difficulties that arise from their unique position as Asian young women in Western society.

As much of the cited research has highlighted, the experiences of Asian young women are along a continuum. At one end there is the acceptance of their position in Asian society and the desire to seek merely a form of accommodation with the host culture, there are those who pursue a 'middle way' between the two cultures, and at the other end of the pole are those who seek assimilation (Ghuman, 1999). There are those who are content and happy and those who find their situation stressful to a point of being intolerable. Since the focus of interest for this study includes the stressful experiences of Asian young women, it is important to examine the literature that deals with these aspects.

Stress and Coping of Asian Young Women

The concepts of 'stress' and 'coping' will be explored further in chapter three. However, there is literature that has specifically focused upon the excessive

psychological tensions and anxieties that some Asian young women have experienced. It is this research that will now be presented.

Kingsbury's (1994) study involved 50 adolescents, including 13 Asians, who had taken overdoses and been admitted to hospital. The two main findings indicated that the Asians were more socially isolated than their Caucasian peers and, although the Asian adolescents had low suicidal intent, they had higher rates of depression, hopelessness, long premeditation time and experience of previous overdose. Asian girls were more likely to be socially isolated once they had gone home from school. Merrill and Owens' (1986) comparative study of Asians and whites in a Birmingham hospital found that Asian females cited unwanted arranged marriages as the reason for self-poisoning, although they point out that white assessors interviewed the adolescents. Biswas (1990) studied a sample of South Asian and white adolescents (aged 17 years and below) and found that the self-poisoning rate of Asian girls was higher than that of whites. Slightly more Asian females than males gave 'culture conflict' as the reason for self-poisoning. Glover *et al* (1989) analysed the attendance records of patients aged 10 to 24 years, admitted for self-poisoning to a London hospital. They found that Asian girls were significantly over-represented in the 15 to 19 age group. Handy *et al*'s (1991) study of 25 Asian and 25 Caucasian adolescents referred for self-harm to a child guidance centre, found that cultural conflicts were paramount in precipitating self-harm amongst Asian adolescents, whereas Caucasian children (the average age 15 years) seemed more affected by family disruption, such as the separation or divorce of parents. Soni-Raleigh's (1996) study of suicide trends in England and Wales, found that Asian women present the highest figures for both actual, and attempted, suicide compared to their white and African-Caribbean counterparts.

These studies have, in the main, been small-scale yet they do indicate that South Asian girls are more prone to suffer from psychological ailments and psychiatric illnesses than either their white peers or Asian boys. Indeed, in courses given by the Trust for the Study of Adolescence: Responding to Suicidal Behaviour (an example: Coleman, 1977), Asian young women are listed amongst the most vulnerable groups. As Ghuman (1999) puts it, these findings give cause for

concern and there is a need for careful consideration in ensuring that appropriate support is offered.

Whilst such studies are helpful in highlighting the situation of Asian girls, it is important to emphasise the part the media has to play in raising the issue with British society as a whole. As Brah and Minhas (1985) point out, the twin notions of 'cultural clash' and 'inter-generational conflict', leading to stress and an 'identity crisis', are often cited as being the common experience of Asian girls. Brah and Minhas go on,

"In this ideological construction of Asian family life the two generations are presented as warring against each other with the adult generally depicted as authoritarian, uncompromising and oppressive... the Asian family is constructed as the source of the problem." (Page 16)

Without reference to the complexities of bi-cultural living (including the possibility of a hostile 'host' culture), the media often scoops shock headlines, using the plight of Asian women as a key factor. Examples being: *'Mother and sons strangled teenager who refused to abort lover's baby'*, the story of a 19 year old Pakistani girl whose pregnancy by a man who was not her husband was a 'great insult' to the family honour and who therefore, 'had to be killed' (P. Derbyshire; *The Express*, 11.5.99, page 8); *'My medieval marriage'*, which told the story of a forced arranged marriage, abuse and repression. The *Daily Mail* stated

"It was clear that behind the case lay a profound clash of cultures faced by so many young Asian women who struggle with the strictures of their religion in this country." (S. Boyle; *Daily Mail*, 13.5.99, page 54)

'Stuff of Dreams' was a piece about Asian young women who face an uphill battle getting to university because parents put pressure on their daughters to conform to an arranged marriage and traditional roles (A. Begum; *Guardian Education*, 7.11.00, pages 10 – 11). There also seems to be an increase in the number of television documentaries that highlight the plight of Asian women, for example, the British Broadcasting Corporation have produced two such pieces - *'Suffering in Silence'*, where the focus was upon the alarming increase in the number of Asian girls deliberately self-injuring (G. Gupta; BBC 2, 17.7.00); and an *Arena* programme that looked at the oppression of Asian women behind the

wearing of veils (A. Hassim; BBC 2, 20.5.00). Although there is pain, suffering and undeniable casualties in any cultural group, the media portrayal of Asian women seems to promote the underlying assumption that 'culture conflict' is at the root of the problem. Ballard (1979) maintains that these views extend into the so-called 'caring' professions of teachers, doctors and social workers, with little knowledge of the extreme complexities of the situation.

The many positive aspects of being an Asian female are not usually alluded to, certainly not in the tabloid press. Miles and Hossain (1999) assert that Western ideological imperialism

"uses the media to obliterate or marginalize cultural and conceptual notions differing from the latest European mezzo-brow trends." (Page 73)

Thus, the Asian girl remains stereotypically labelled as 'victim'.

Siann and Khalid's (1984) study of Muslim females living in a large Scottish town found that, whilst family honour or *izzat* is of utmost importance to Muslim women, they felt that they were protected both economically and physically and that they enjoyed a caring and close family system. Gilani and Coleman (1997) found that in a study of 80 pairs of white and Pakistani (immigrant) mothers and their teenage daughters, Pakistani daughters and mothers expressed more intimacy and relational harmony than white daughters and mothers. Pakistani girls also reported a sense of greater connectedness and mutuality. Shain (2002) suggests that, far from being passive victims of static cultures, Asian girls are actively involved in creating and recreating identities that re-work the cultures of home and the wider society.

Wade and Souter (1992) suggest that some Asian young women cope by 'compartmentalising' their behaviour. Drury (1991) and Shaw (1989), see this as a way of maintaining the continuity, distinctiveness and self-esteem of their personal identities. Breakwell (1986) clarifies the function of compartmentalization as being the ability to hold 'completely mutual self-definitions simultaneously' (page 95). Ghuman (1999) and Bhatti (1999) give examples of Asian girls coming to school in their traditional clothes, for

example, a veil, before changing into Western dress in the toilets and at the end of the day reverting to their home clothes before leaving school. That is, the girls try to fit in as best they can both at home and out of the home, even if this involves changes in behaviour and appearance. For others, a fundamental change (Breakwell, 1986) may be necessary. Ghuman (1999) cites the example of Asian girls who give up hope of a career and accept an arranged marriage, in all probability re-appraising their 'identity' and seeking self-esteem and distinctiveness in being a good wife and mother.

Bhatti (1999) found that Asian children tried to cope with conflicting pressures by learning to 'keep their problems to themselves', and suggested that they were not enabled to share completely at home or at school, since their concerns did not often come up in discussion. Bhatti explained that, when topics did arise, stereotypical views about Asian children were often perpetuated. She concludes

"As a result of all this, children learnt to keep their problems to themselves... they would be able to get through life without betraying their parents and without losing their own integrity." (Bhatti, 1999, page 146)

Bhatti comments that many of the Asian adolescents in her study said they felt invisible in school. The theme of *invisibility* is also reflected in the London Borough of Newham report, *Girls Voices* (2000), where the focus is upon the emotional and behavioural difficulties of girls. The report concluded that Asian girls are subject to forms of cultural stereotyping that renders them 'mute and invisible' (page 19), the authors acknowledging that the report lacked the 'voices of Asian girls'. *Girls Voices* went on to suggest that, as a result of invisibility,

"Asian girls access least support from both statutory and voluntary services." (Page 19)

It seems, then, that Asian young women's experiences of cross-cultural living span a continuum from those with acute anxiety and psychological difficulties to those who experience the exposure to both cultures as enriching and advantageous. The way in which they cope varies from individual to individual and is highly context-dependent (Frydenberg, 1997). Just as adults cope with their everyday difficulties in a sequential manner, that is, dealing with one thing

at a time, so too do adolescents (Coleman and Hendry, 1990). Ghuman (1999) suggests that most Asian boys and girls in their teens tend to concentrate on their studies and helping at home rather than dating, thus avoiding confrontation. They tend to date once they leave home for college or university, and discuss arranged marriages after completing their education.

This review of literature will now focus upon the Asian girls' experiences of further education, including cultural expectations as well as pressure to conform by the educational establishment.

Asian Young Women, Further Education and Career Aspirations

In 1994, the Policy Studies Institute and Social and Community Planning Research undertook the Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities. Modood *et al* (1997) outline the findings which were drawn from a sample of 5196 people of Caribbean and Asian origin, together with a comparison sample of 2867 white people. It was found that South Asians were most likely to be continuing in post-compulsory education, and, in reverse to whites, men more so than women. The data also suggested that people from the ethnic minorities in general are staying on in education for longer periods (Modood *et al*, 1997). Craft and Craft's (1983) study of ethnic minority participation in further and higher education also indicated that Asians were more likely to remain in full-time education, although other studies show that they find it more difficult to find jobs (for example, Anwar, 1982; Brookes, 1983; Griffin, 1986). The Labour Force Survey (DE, 1991) found the highest unemployment rates in Britain to be among Pakistani, Bangladeshi and West Indian communities in the 16 to 24 age range.

Gillborn (1997) emphasises that studies rarely distinguish between different South Asian populations and have often focused on urban areas, such as London. Furthermore, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people have often been aggregated into a single category, without consideration for differences in religious, political and economic compositions. Gillborn draws on recent data from the Birmingham Education Department as well as his own studies



(Gillborn, 1997; Gillborn and Gipps, 1996) and comments that, on average, Indian young people tend to be the highest qualified of the main South Asian groups and often achieve better results than their white peers. In contrast, Bangladeshi and Pakistani students are more likely to leave compulsory schooling with fewer than five or more higher-grade passes, or without having achieved graded results.

Taylor and Hegarty (1985) reflect that some FE courses recruit far larger numbers of ethnic minority students than other courses in the same college. They cite the science subjects as often being chosen because they are directly vocational and thought to increase the chances of getting employment. Siann and Khalid (1984) argue that, for Muslims, aspirations are not towards achievements of individuals in isolation but instead focus upon the honour and future well-being of the family. It follows then that so-called high status careers, for example, medicine, pharmacy, law, will be those that are seen as most desirable. Siann and Knox (1992) found that this is indeed the case. In their interviews with 37 Muslim and 32 non-Muslim secondary school girls, they found that the Muslim girls were more inclined to value work that their family and community would rate as high status, since their sense of worth and self-esteem stemmed from their contribution to family honour. Siann and Knox found that Asian young women were less likely to value jobs that offered opportunities for individual expression and personal enhancement, yet Muslim girls did not have particularly higher career aspirations than their peers.

Basit's (1996) study of 24 British Asian Muslim girls in the final year of secondary school found that there was an ardent desire for upward mobility through education and careers. They aspired to occupations that were unambiguously middle-class. None of the girls envisaged going into manual or factory work and their parents supported their daughter's desire to work only if the career was perceived as safe and would not jeopardise the girl's safety or reputation. The girls did not want to go against the teachings of their religion and were keen to combine a career with marriage and family life.

Like other researchers (for example, Kitwood and Borrill, 1980; Stopes-Roe and Cochrane, 1984, 1988), Siann and Knox's (1992) research found little evidence of conflict between young Muslim people and their parents over important life issues. Furthermore, their work indicated that the great majority of Muslim girls reported parental interest in, and support for, their vocational and career aspirations. In the case of a girl who is not doing well at school and has no wish to pursue a career, parents may prioritise marriage rather than further or higher education. Siann and Knox found that most Muslim girls found this approach acceptable. Siann et al. (1990) present evidence that there is little conflict between girls and their parents over careers but they point out the lack of parental knowledge about careers and employment opportunities. If they do seek guidance, parents and students are faced with professionals, armed with 'expert knowledge', who ask clients to trust them and, in many cases, not question their judgement. Complicated 'professional' language and rhetoric make for an aura of mystery (Tomlinson, 1989).

Tomlinson (1997) points out that, in the new market framework, minority students are less likely to be sought after as 'desirable' commodities since the college itself now often bears the financial burden. Money given by the Home Office under Section 11 of the 1966 Local Government Act for special needs of ethnic minorities is now discretionary.

Although their numbers do not equal Asian males, high numbers of Asian girls are going on to attend colleges of further education. They are aspiring to high status careers that will bring honour to the family and there is evidence to suggest they are strongly supported by their parents. However, within the FE colleges themselves, South Asian girls are faced with complex patterns of cultural and racial difference that are prone to stereotypical interpretation. While there is no specific research on this, related studies will be referred to.

The Match Between Student and Teacher Perspectives

Thornley and Siann (1991) discuss the stereotypes about South Asian families that are often alluded to within educational establishments. They maintain that, where there is lack of success, 'cultural clash' is seen as the cause, with the Asian girl being the 'victim of her family'. Thornley and Siann suggest that no responsibility is taken by the educational system, since they ascribe 'problems of personal identity' as being the root cause of any difficulties. The girls are assumed to have internalised Western values in opposition to traditional parental ones. Thornley and Siann go on:

“Inaccuracies in perception arise when members of one group try to understand another group's way of life by applying uncritically, assumptions which are appropriate to their own way of life.” (Page 239)

In educational institutions, FE included, the white majority is seen as the 'norm', against which other minority groups are compared. As a result, minority groups are often perceived as being 'strange' or deficient in some way (Pheonix, 1997). This, in turn, may lead to some students or families being reluctant to seek help for fear of perpetuating the notion of deficiency.

The college scenario is undoubtedly complex and multi-faceted. Tutors in FE are faced with their own agendas to 'stay afloat' amidst change, with stress and anxiety being frequent symptoms of the inherent difficulties. As Bhatti (1999) discovered, teachers see their primary purpose as being centred upon teaching rather than pastoral concerns, with staff having little time to be 'social workers' (page 145). The student has a separate, equally important and difficult agenda. If there is a mismatch between pupils' own understanding of, and responses to, the experiences that they find stressful and staff's awareness and understanding of these, it comes as no surprise. Sharp and Thompson (1992) explored this disparity in children aged 12 to 14 years. Their data indicated instances of clear agreement among many of the students as to what was causing them stress, and how they responded to it. The teachers, in contrast, seemed to be using stereotypes gained from general life experience when describing the stress of their pupils, rather than basing their understanding on the actual experiences and

behaviour of the pupils themselves. Lazarus (1975) comments that adult and child can never experience youth in the same way. Lang (1985) considered the mismatch between school-aged pupils and teacher perceptions of reality and concluded that teachers often underestimated how seriously students perceive problems. Furthermore, as the Sharp and Thompson study indicated, the majority of pupils are unlikely to tell a teacher if they were feeling stressed. Teachers could recognise the more extreme outbursts of weeping and storming but the more subtle signs of lateness or 'quietness' could easily be misconstrued or overlooked. Bhatti (1999) found that some teachers were of the opinion that Asian children 'probably did not need help' since they had their communities and, anyway, if they needed assistance, 'they would have asked for it' (page 145). Bhatti also found that many of those in the 16 to 18 age group felt themselves to be 'invisible' since teachers

"did not celebrate their presence, their festivals, their culture or their achievements." (Page 202)

In addition, there are the complexities of cultural and gender differences in responding to difficulties. As Brah and Minhas (1985) state, there is a tendency by teachers to stress the 'political neutrality' of their schools and colleges, and their 'professionalism'. In other words, 'there is no racism here, children are treated the same regardless of colour or race'. Brah and Minhas go on to say

"This particular approach of denying pupils their racial/cultural identities is just one way in which racism is made manifest." (Page 19)

There is also cause for concern in that teachers may misinterpret linguistic abilities (Gillborn, 1997), and erroneously perceive students as having learning difficulties (Troyna, 1991; Troyna and Siraj-Blatchford, 1993).

Placed in a fluctuating environment, the Asian girl in FE is likely to encounter high levels of staff stress (Kirsch, 1994) with tutors often feeling undervalued and powerless (Burrage and Stewart, 1990). Little wonder, then, that any difficulties that arise for Asian young women may be perceived by tutors as being outside of their control and remit, that is, located within the family context or due to 'cultural clash'. 'Treating all students the same' denies individual as

well as cultural differences and brings with it a danger of overlooking special needs. There have, however, been moves towards meeting the needs of different racial and ethnic groups and this literature will now be discussed.

Ways Forward

Pheonix (1997) suggests that the fundamental principle of 'self knowledge' should be used as a starting point from which professionals can strive to offer equality of provision and service to all racial and ethnic groups. She suggests that practitioners need to have an understanding of racisms as social processes, be able to discuss the issues and be comfortable interacting with those from different ethnic groups. Crucially, Pheonix emphasises the need to listen to people constructed as 'other', without regarding them in stereotypical ways. Thomas (2000) argues that, in order for multicultural education to be extended to effect culture change in classrooms, training should enable teachers to be innovative and adaptive, realistic goals should be set, and the curriculum widened.

As well as establishing a sound philosophical basis from which to address the needs of students in a multi-ethnic FE environment, there are practical ways in which Asian young women and their families might be supported. Basit (1996) suggests effective home-school/college liaison; Ullah (1998) recommends the provision of a service that could offer mediation between girls and their families; Siann and Knox (1992) advocate clear liaison between the college, the student and their families, to ensure that there is an awareness of the full range of career choices; Taylor and Hegarty (1985) suggest that detailed information needs to be gathered systematically on existing practice, to provide material that could be critically analysed in terms of resource implications, constraints and opportunities. In this way, a clearer view would be obtained of the potential contribution of FE in a multicultural society.

Gilborn (1997) takes educational policy-makers to task for failing to see racism, in any form, as an issue. Gilborn (1997) makes particular mention of Dearing's (1996) work and criticises the report for presenting 'stereotyping as a problem resting in the minds of young people' (page 138), rather than viewing the difficulties as arising out of structural constraints working on, and through, the education system itself. Parker-Jenkins (1995) suggests that teachers should endeavour to perceive the curriculum from a non-Western perspective in order to ensure representation and contributions from a wide range of cultures.

As Pheonix (1997) purports, it is important that practitioners continue to struggle with the complexities of anti-oppressive practices, and to subject their work to scrutiny. Jewell (1991) recognised the need to address these issues and, in relation to the educational psychology service, said

"The profession should be more aware that the practice of psychology in a context where psychologists don't explore their personal values and attitudes towards these issues is in itself invalid." (Page 19)

The importance of examining one's own values and constructions of reality is crucial in addressing the needs of Asian young women. As Siann and Khalid (1984) comment, it is difficult to investigate comparative value systems without carrying over deeply embedded assumptions. It is extremely difficult to disentangle our own emotions regarding the role and status of women in our own culture, when we look at the role and status of women in other traditions. With these issues in mind chapters three and four will present the theoretical models and methodological tools that are to be employed within the context of this study.

CHAPTER THREE

Theoretical Models

Introduction

Chapter three presents theoretical models that will inform both the methodological tools used and the way in which the ensuing data is to be analysed. Theories of adolescent development are presented, including the life-span developmental approach, with Coleman and Hendry's (1990) 'focal' model being central to the discussion. The review then puts forward theories relating to the development of ethnic identity, including the views held by Erikson (1968), Marcia (1994) and Phinney (1990). Cross-cultural psychological theories of collectivism and individualism (Triandis, 1994) are presented, with consideration given to implications in a multi-ethnic society. An overview of the main stress theories follows, with emphasis placed upon the 'interactional' model of perceived stress (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Recent theories of, and approaches to, coping are examined, with special reference to the work of Frydenberg and Lewis (1993).

The Nature of Adolescence

Adolescence is a time of complex and challenging developmental tasks as the move is made into adulthood. There are the physiological changes of puberty, which continue to take effect throughout adolescence as the body form matures and grows. Such changes impact upon the emerging sense of self and a host of other psychological variables (Coleman, 1987). Fundamental cognitive changes occur which are less apparent to observers but are highly significant in terms of

the development of operational thought. Intellectually, the individual moves from the concrete stage to the formal stage of thinking (Piaget, 1952; 1959; 1969). The 'formal' thinker is able to explain issues, and formulate and test hypotheses. Cognitive development brings with it both change and consolidation of the self-concept (Coleman and Hendry, 1990; 1999), increasing emotional independence, and the necessity for decisions about occupation, values, sexual behaviour and friendship choices.

Independence is often regarded as one of the central themes of adolescence, when the young person is expected to separate to some degree from parents and significant family members. The peer group becomes an important point of reference, with adolescents influencing each other in the learning of social skills and strategies. Sexual development is clearly associated with social adaptation and the formation of sexual orientation and identity. There is often a movement towards intimacy with the opposite sex and changing patterns in same-sex relationships. The young person has to negotiate the critical period when he or she can legally leave school and enter adult society; this is inextricably linked to the world of work and possible unemployment. Consideration has to be given to choosing and planning for an occupation or making plans for an alternative.

Three major theoretical approaches are traditionally applied to the study of adolescence: psychoanalytic, sociological and life-span developmental psychology. Psychoanalytic theory views adolescence as being a period of marked vulnerability and emphasis is laid on the likelihood of maladaptive behaviour stemming from the inability to cope with conflict and tension. The process of disengagement and identity formation are given special prominence. Freud (1937), Blos (1962), and Erikson (1968) are among those who are associated with this approach. The social-psychological models put forward by, among others, Elder (1968) Brim (1965) and Baumrind (1975), are marked by a concern with roles and role change, and with the processes of socialisation. The two approaches share the concept of adolescent 'storm and stress', viewing the teenage years as a 'problem stage' in human development (Coleman and Hendry, 1990; 1999). Coleman and Hendry (1999) suggest that the real problem with 'storm and stress' theories, such as Erikson's (1968), lies in the fact that the

extent to which adolescents experience identity crises is not made specific, nor is the broad range of adolescent experiences acknowledged.

The life-span approach is more of an orientation than a theory, and views development as a lifelong process where no special state of maturity is assumed (Baltes et al., 1980). The importance of the whole context is emphasised: the family, geographical, historical, social and political setting. This approach assumes that individuals and their families influence each other and that individuals are active producers of their own development, while influenced by the context of social change. Adolescence is investigated as a circumstance within the life span.

Adolescence is a complicated period of change, yet, as Coleman and Hendry maintain, 'storm and stress' is not an inevitable outcome. Recent reviews of adolescence (e.g. Petersen and Ebata, 1987; Siddique and D'Arcy, 1984; Earls, 1986) indicate that while a minority experience difficulty during the adolescent transition, the majority cope well. Durkin (1992) observed that only about 5 to 15 percent of the adolescent population shows severe psychological disturbance.

Conger and Peterson (1984) explain:

"While many adolescents face occasional periods of uncertainty and self-doubt, of loneliness and sadness, of anxiety and concern for the future, they are also likely to experience joy, excitement, curiosity, a sense of adventure, and a feeling of competence in mastering new challenges."
(Pages 26-27)

Coleman and Hendry (1990; 1999) assert that adolescence needs a theory, not of abnormality, but of normality, that should take account of results from empirical studies. Coleman's (1978) 'focal' model of adolescence grew out of a study of normal adolescence where findings showed that attitudes to all relationships changed as a function of age, but the results also indicated that concerns about different issues reached a peak at different stages in the adolescent process without being specific to a particular age. Issues are not necessarily linked to developmental level and there is no set sequence. One issue is not necessarily resolved before tackling the next, and Coleman postulates that some individuals find themselves facing more than one issue at a time. If multiple issues arise, it is

more likely that problems will occur. The 'focal' model goes some way towards reconciling the apparent contradiction between the amount of adaptation required during the transitional process and the ability of most young people to cope successfully with the process (Coleman and Hendry, 1990; 1999). Using this model, Simmons and Blyth's (1987) work implied that the more 'issues' the adolescent has to cope with, the more indications of stress there are likely to be. The focal approach suggests that the individual is an agent in his or her own development, dealing with, where possible, one issue at a time. Where there is little possibility for the individual to limit or control the number of issues to be dealt with at any one time, levels of stress are likely to be higher.

It is not unreasonable to suppose that, for the 16 to 19 year olds in further education, several issues around the transition into adulthood are a real part of everyday life. The 'focal' model of adolescence, encompassed within the notion of a life-span developmental process, would imply that, for many young people, and in particular Asian young women, it is necessary to address multiple issues at any one time. The college setting inevitably means that the student has to deal with choosing an appropriate career and keep pace with the cognitive demands made on them, whilst engaging with their peer group in both same-sex and opposite sex relationships. Whilst their body form is maturing and growing, they have to negotiate relationships both within the college setting, in the community and at home. The student, by the very fact that they attend college, is expected to be developing autonomy and independence both cognitively and socially. Even if, as Coleman suggests, the young person is an agent in his or her own development and faces a limited number of issues at any time, the complicated process of developing a cultural identity and independence is an ever-present force to be reckoned with.

As Ghuman (1999) notes, Asian young people share these experiences with other adolescents, yet they are faced with additional challenges. They often receive conflicting messages from their families and communities about what constitutes 'proper' behaviour, values and attitudes (Ghuman, page 109). Asian adolescents also have to face the racial prejudices and discrimination of their host society.

Also, Asian girls (especially of the Muslim and Sikh faiths) may have to learn to cope with traditional views regarding their role and position in the family and larger community, which differ from those of their college and wider British society.

Bound up in the complexity of development from adolescence into adulthood, is the move towards a sense of personal identity, including explorations of ethnicity and gender. In order to present a complete picture of the experiences of Asian young women, it is apposite to now overview theoretical approaches to identity development and concepts of ethnic identity.

Identity Development

Erikson (1968) is widely held to be the forefather in the formation of theoretical approaches to identity development. Erikson implied that it is necessary for the adolescent to experience some form of crisis as he or she moves from a sense of identity diffusion towards identity achievement. As Coleman (1999) points out, Erikson does not acknowledge the broad range of adolescent experiences.

Marcia (1966, 1980, 1994), extended Erikson's developmental framework and defined identity as

“A coherent sense of one's meaning to oneself and to others within a social context. This sense of identity suggests an individual's continuity with the past, a personally meaningful present, and a direction for the future.” (1994, page 70)

Erikson opined that identity is achieved as the result of exploration and experimentation that typically takes place during adolescence. However, Marcia (1994) suggests that

“Successive identity reformulations can be expected throughout the life cycle as the individual meets and resolves the challenges involved in ego growth.” (Page 71)

Marcia elaborates on this and suggests that there are four ego identity statuses:

- *Identity Diffusion*: marked by a lack of commitment to either vocation or beliefs. Individuals are often seen as apathetic and may be socially isolated or, in contrast, may be compulsively seeking social contact. They have the most difficulty thinking under stress.
- *Identity Foreclosure*: where ascribed views of parents and significant others are taken on, without exploration. Individuals do not explore and are generally conforming and obedient. They experience little interpersonal conflict.
- *Moratorium*: where issues are being explored but no commitment has been made. This status is also known as 'identity crisis'. Individuals are often intense and anxious. They are likely to vacillate between rebellion and conformity.
- *Identity Achievement*: where firm commitments are made after the exploration of issues. Individuals seem settled and are able to make their own decisions based upon internalised, self-constructed values. They are likely to be able to acknowledge differences with family members but do not necessarily hold similar beliefs. Initial identity configuration may change as life crises arise.

Identity achievement and *foreclosure* individuals share a commitment to adult roles, whilst those with the status of *moratorium* or *diffusion* share a lack of commitment. Coleman and Hendry (1999) refer to a number of studies (Archer, 1982; Adams and Jones, 1983; Waterman and Goldman, 1976; Adams and Fitch, 1982) when they comment:

“The challenge of identity is not necessarily resolved at any one point in time, but continues to re-emerge again and again as the individual moves through late adolescence and early adulthood.” (Page 64)

Whilst Marcia acknowledges that identity development is a socially embedded process, his focus upon psychological perspectives and internal exploration implies a rather passive environment (Yoder, 2000). Theorists are increasingly

turning their attention to the context of identity formation; for example, Phinney and Goossens (1996) edited a special issue of the *Journal of Adolescence*, entitled 'Identity development in context'.

Others (for example, Friedenberg, 1959; Erikson, 1980; Cote and Allahaar, 1994) have also emphasised that changing social structures may have direct impact upon the conditions in which adolescence is experienced. Yoder (2000) goes further and suggests the concept of *barriers* provides a means by which to describe external influences, including socio-cultural variables, which affect and possibly limit individual development options. The individual may be subject to external conditions over which he or she may have little control. Yoder (2000) presents the example of

"An adolescent girl ... whose family forbids work and arranges her upcoming marriage and who may be encouraged by her school and teachers to pursue academic and professional goals." (Page 100)

She goes on to argue that, rather than describing identity status as simply *foreclosed*, it is necessary for those in education, research and applied psychology to be aware of *exploration barriers* that underlie circumstances. A *barrier* designation provides a diagnostic tool that attempts to identify external forces imposed upon developing individuals over which they have no control. Thus, complex socio-cultural and economic boundaries may provide barriers to adolescent development, especially where individuals are working towards the formation of ethnic identity.

The Development of Ethnic Identity

Coleman and Hendry (1999) point out that there is a growing interest in ethnicity among researchers in the field of identity development. As Phinney (1990) puts it, the task of understanding ethnic identity is complicated because of the unique features of each group. It is, therefore, difficult to draw general conclusions. Although there is a long history of interest in the development of identity, ethnic identity has been far less studied, although several underpinning theories and critical issues have been put forward.

Goossens and Phinney (1996) note that theories have been derived from a Western viewpoint. Furthermore, cultural differences in identity formation remain largely unexplored. Phinney and Devich-Navarro (1997) and others (LaFromboise et al., 1993; Phinney and Alipuria, 1996; Verkuyten, 1993, 1995) found that, where individuals are exposed to two different cultural frameworks, the process of identity formation is often highly complex. Cote (1996) suggests that *identity diffusion* is becoming a 'culturally adaptive' form of identity, which, for some, replaces *identity achievement* and that, where traditional values predominate, *foreclosure* may be the most adaptive cultural identity status. Others (Marcia, 1989; Kraus and Mtizscherlich, 1995; Archer and Waterman, 1990) have suggested that cultural adaptation of *identity diffusion* appears to be more strategic than apathetic. Furthermore, Cote (1996) and Stephen et al. (1992) point out that *identity achievement* may involve cycles of *moratorium* and *achievement*, rather than fixed stages.

There is no widely agreed definition of *ethnic* identity and this indicates some confusion surrounding the topic. A well-used definition is that of Tajfel (1981), who views ethnic identity as a component of social identity:

“ The part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership.” (Page 255)

Phinney (1989) proposes a three-stage progression towards the development of ethnic identity. In the early stage, the individual shows a preference for the dominant culture. The second stage is characterised by an exploration of one's own ethnicity, which then moves into the final stage of achieving and internalising one's own ethnic identity.

Phinney (1990) presents the most prevalent conceptual frameworks that are used to understand empirical research in this field:

- *Social identity theory* (Tajfel and Turner (1979): where membership of a group provides individuals with a sense of belonging that contributes to a

positive self-concept. This theory addresses the issue of potential problems resulting from participation in two cultures. Lewin (1948) and Tajfel (1978) suggest that identification with two different groups can be problematic because of conflicting attitudes, values and behaviours.

- *Acculturation* (Berry, Trimble and Olmedo, 1986): being changes in cultural attitudes, values and behaviours that result from contact between two distinct cultures. Underlying these issues is the theme of culture conflict between two distinct groups and the resultant psychological consequences.

Berry (1990; 1994) further developed the *acculturation* approach by suggesting four possible positions for any one individual. These positions are:

- *Integration*: individuals would endeavour to retain cultural traditions but would also develop and maintain relationships with the mainstream culture.
- *Assimilation*: individuals would endeavour to develop and maintain relationships with the mainstream culture but would give little or no attention to the retention of cultural traditions and identification.
- *Separation*: individuals would endeavour to maintain their cultural traditions but would give little or no attention to establishing relationships and identification in the mainstream culture.
- *Marginalisation*: individuals would give little or no attention to either retaining cultural traditions and identification or establishing relationships and identification in the mainstream culture.

As Phinney and Devich-Navarro (1997) point out, this approach does not take into account the variation in ethnic and mainstream involvement among minority groups. They propose a more elaborate model that includes more complex bi-

cultural possibilities. Coleman and Hendry (1999) describe Phinney and Devich-Navarro's model when they suggest that an individual might either reject their own culture entirely (*assimilation*), or manage to fuse with the majority culture so that the two cultures become one (*fusion*). Alternatively, the ethnic culture and mainstream culture may be perceived as overlapping, with the individual occupying the middle ground (*blended bi-cultural*) and alternating between one culture and the other (*alternating bi-cultural*). Finally, the individual may find it impossible to bring two cultures together and might either identify solely with their ethnic culture (*separated*) or find themselves outside both cultures (*marginal*). Hall (1995) asserts that *culture* is not settled or fixed and that similar origins do not necessarily guarantee shared values and meanings.

Eyou et al. (2000) point out that research to date has yielded inconsistent findings about the psychological adjustment of individuals who are *assimilated* or *separated*. Verkuyten and Kwa (1994) found no significant differences between the psychological well-being of adolescents who were separated and those who were integrated. However, other studies (Berry et al., 1987; de Domanico et al., 1987) found separation to be associated with poorer psychological adjustment. It is important to add that the fluid nature of culture, and of the identities embedded within, is far from static. Hall (1995) asserts that *culture* is not settled or fixed and that similar origins do not necessarily guarantee shared values and meanings.

Most of the studies on ethnicity in the UK have focused on primary school children. However, Hutnik (1991) investigated ethnic awareness in 14 to 16 year olds and concluded that South Asian adolescents in Britain are more aware of their ethnicity than their English peers. Ghuman (1999) concludes that one of the main findings to emerge from a literature survey is that ethnicity, for Asian adolescents, seems to be rooted in religion and language. The dual factors of in-group belongingness and exclusion from the mainstream are closely associated with the emergence of ethnicity (Ghuman, 1999). Coleman and Hendry (1999) assert that, in Asian cultures in Britain, parents are more likely to expect a greater degree of commitment to ethnic values. Conflict between Asian parents and their

adolescents is likely to focus upon the extent to which integration into the host culture takes place.

Rattansi and Pheonix (1997) suggest that an emphasis on the ways in which individuals occupy multiple positions, and have a range of identities, makes for the possibility of creative 'hybridisation'. Young people are thus able to borrow, mix and match, elements from a range of ethnic and gender identities, with different ones acquiring salience in different contexts. Rattansi and Phoenix go on to stress that this should not be seen as a smooth process of integration. Woollett et al. (1994) describe Asian women's constructions of their ethnic identity as fluid and changing, in keeping with the changing contexts of their lives. They go on to argue that ethnicity and ethnic identity are not homogenous categories; rather, Asian women's representations are complex and various. Woollett and Marshall (2001) emphasize the multiple, fluid and hybrid nature of identity, and in doing so they pose challenges to the traditional notions of cultural identification as static and self-contained.

This more fluid conceptualisation of identity seems to be particularly relevant to Asian girls as they encounter changing and diverse contexts. It seems likely that, for Asian girls, the concepts of acculturation and hybrid identities are particularly pertinent because of the very different expectations of the family and college. As previously stated, for a South Asian young woman the environment of home is likely to encompass a *collectivistic* orientation and value system, whilst that of the school or college is likely to represent the more *individualistic* notions of Western society. In order to put into context the differences between the first generation of Asian immigrants and their offspring (now second or third generation), it is important to explore aspects of *collectivistic* and *individualistic* orientation.

Individualism and Collectivism

The construct of individualism and collectivism has its roots in cross-cultural psychology. Triandis (1994, 1995) is the leading exponent of this model and defines *collectivism* as

“A social pattern consisting of closely linked individuals who see themselves as part of one or more collectives (family, co-workers, tribe, nation): are primarily motivated by the norms of, and duties imposed by, those collectives; are willing to give priority to the goals of these collectives over their own personal goals; and emphasise their connectedness to members of these collectives.” (Page 2, 1995)

Individualism is defined as

“A social pattern that consists of loosely linked individuals who view themselves as independent of collectives; are primarily motivated by their own preferences, needs, rights, and the contracts they have established with others; give priority to their personal goals over the goals of others; and emphasise rational analyses of the advantages and disadvantages to associating with others.” (Page 2, 1995)

However, individual differences mean that the construct of *collectivism* and *individualism* is by no means simplistic. Triandis maintains that there are those who are *allocentric* (believing, feeling and acting like collectivists) and those who are *idiocentric* (believing, feeling and acting like individualists), yet there are allocentrics in individualistic societies and idiocentrics in collectivist cultures. He does not suggest that one mode of operating is more successful than the other but indicates that the contexts in which individuals find themselves determine whether or not they are part of an *in-group* or *out-group* (Triandis, 1994). Triandis carried out extensive, worldwide empirical research (Triandis 1994; Hui and Triandis 1986) and confirmed Hofstede's (1980) contention that European-derived or so-called Western cultures are more individualistic than Asian or Latin American cultures.

For those in a collectivist environment, achievements are principally viewed as bringing honour and glory to the family or wider community group. The individual may be required to sacrifice personal goals for the good of the extended family. Sethi (1990), who examined the experiences of adolescents of Indian origin in the US, explained the dilemma:

“The clash of tradition occurs when parents with a collectivistic ethnic orientation are attempting to raise children in a society with an individualistic orientation.” (Page 12)

Ghuman (1999), illustrates the complexities by citing Shaw (1988):

“In fact my disappointment arose from my own prejudices... from a Western point of view, an individual who fulfils her or his own role with the family, *bradari* (kinship) and community, does so at the cost of individual freedom. However, most Pakistanis themselves, including the younger generation, do not see the matter in this way. They do not prize ‘individuality’ as high as Westerners do, and for most of them the sacrifice of ‘individuality’ is more than offset by the advantages of fulfilling one’s role within the family, *bradari* and community.” (Page 128)

If, then, the notion of collectivist and individualist culture is added to the process of acculturation, where there is inter-group contact and adaptation the picture for the Asian young woman in the UK becomes even more complex. Not only does she have to negotiate her way to a healthy ethnic identity, she does so against a backdrop of an individualistic FE environment on the one hand, and the collectivistic family and community system on the other. There is no surprise if the process invokes difficulties and stresses that are unique to South Asian girls. Indeed, Talbani and Hasanali (2000) suggest that Asian young women in the UK find it difficult to negotiate between cultural control and individual freedom, especially since there is high cost associated with being vocal or expressing a dissenting voice in the community. Gilani (1999) questions the use of collectivistic and individualistic models, since a balance between connectedness and *individuation* is often put forward as a prerequisite for healthy family relationships in a typical Western nuclear family (Grotevant and Cooper, 1986). However, separateness and self-assertion are not considered to be desirable personality traits in Asian girls.

Stress: Theoretical Models

According to the Oxford English Dictionary the term 'stress' has been in use since the 14th century. It is a term that is familiar to all, so long as it is used in a sufficiently vague and general context (Cox, 1978). However, because 'stress' lacks any agreed definition, it is understood by very few, and even by those few in totally contradictory ways (Rutter, 1981).

Monat and Lazarus (1991) suggest that 'stress' is traditionally construed in one of three different ways: as physiological or systemic, being concerned primarily with the disturbances of tissue systems (see for example, Cannon, 1929; Selye, 1956); as social, when there is disruption of a social unit or system (see for example, Smelser, 1963); and as psychological, associated with cognitive factors leading to the evaluation of threat (see for example, Lazarus, 1966). However, the use of any one definition on its own is problematic.

Derogatis and Coons (1993) also outline theories of stress that are widely in use. These are: stimulus-based, where cumulative stress is imposed upon the individual by the environment (see for example, Forman, 1993; Elliott and Eisdorfer, 1982; Holmes and Rahe, 1967); response-based, where the individual responds to life events (see for example, Selye, 1936, 1991; Roskies, 1991, Cannon, 1929); and interactional or transactional, where the individual is seen as mediator between stimulus and response (see for example, Lazarus 1966; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

Stimulus-based theories focus on the impact of major life events and daily hassles upon the individual. However, stimulus-based definitions create difficulties because any situation may or may not be stressful, depending on the characteristics of the individual and their associated meanings of the situation (Monat and Lazarus, 1991). The response-oriented view of stress focuses upon physiological changes. However, a physiological or response-based definition may have different psychological meanings, for example, increased heart rate or blood pressure may arise from extreme fright or heavy exercise (McGrath, 1970).

The interactional-transactional model takes into account such individual differences in perception and is of most relevance in the context of this study. In this model, stress is viewed as a transaction that includes the stimuli-producing stress reactions, the reactions themselves, and the various intervening processes (Lazarus, 1966). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define psychological stress as

“ A relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her own resources and endangering his or her well-being.” (Page 19)

This model takes account of the interaction between the organism and its environment, the situational variables, the person's characteristics and the individual's appraisal of the situation (Frydenberg, 1997). The effect of the stressor is dependent upon the person's perception of the demand and their perceived capability to respond. It is the interplay between a person's motives and beliefs and an environment where there are threats, harm and challenges. The transactional model implies a fluctuating, fluid process with a host of variables interchangeably affecting each other.

Lazarus and Folkman's definition of stress comes from a psychological viewpoint. However, they also acknowledge the impact that various environmental factors have upon the individual. My own research adopts a psychological perspective, yet it also focuses upon the crucial role external, sociological factors play in contributing to experiences of stress. Yoder (2000) suggests that adolescents often have little control over external conditions and that they are subjected to *barriers* that may impede their identity development. It follows that the interplay between psychological, internal factors and sociological, external factors are of primary importance in adolescent experiences of stress.

Central to the interactional model is the notion of appraisal, where a person evaluates stressors in terms of significance for their own well-being. Each situation is assessed according to: the level of harm, threat and challenge. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define this stage as primary appraisal, where the

individual asks 'what is at stake?' The person's view of the situation may be either positive or negative; there may be some desirable outcome or indeed there may be negative impact. During secondary appraisal, the person focuses upon what can be accomplished, asking, 'what are the resources available to me in order to deal with the situation?' Appraisal is a fundamental part of the coping process and stress is regarded, by Lazarus, as a post-appraisal state. That is, stress responses only occur after an event has been perceived as being stressful. In the transactional model, nothing by itself can be considered stressful, rather, any stimulus, no matter how noxious or how pleasant, can be viewed as either desired, interesting, non-threatening, or non-harmful and, if it is so appraised, it will not be considered a stressor (Lazarus, 1966).

Research done using the transactional model tends to be human-oriented and traditionally uses psychological measures, both for how the subject evaluates the stress and the subject's reactions to it. A central theme in transactional stress theory is that of ensuring that nothing is taken for granted, that it is only the individuals themselves who can confirm or deny the presence of stressors. Lazarus and Folkman (1991) suggest that different parameters of a potentially stressful life event determine an individual's reaction to that event. The most common parameters being: frequency, predictability, uncertainty and control. Seiffge-Krenke (1995) further suggests that it is imperative to consider the nature of the stressors, the internal resources of the individual, the type of social supports available as well as the coping process.

The Concept of Coping

Embedded within stress theory are concepts about how individuals cope with stress. The term 'coping' has acquired several meanings but there seems to be a growing agreement among professionals (e.g., Lazarus, Averill and Opton, 1974; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Murphy, 1974; White, 1974) that coping refers to:

"An individual's efforts to master demands (conditions of harm, threat, or challenge) that are appraised (or perceived) as exceeding or taxing his or her resources." (Monat and Lazarus, 1991, page 5)

This theory places importance upon the individual's perception about his or her own coping skills. The notion stems from Albert Bandura (1977, 1991) who highlighted the perception of capabilities rather than actual behaviour. Perceived self-efficacy, a term developed by Bandura, is characteristic of those who judge themselves as able to handle situations that would otherwise be intimidating or overwhelming (Frydenberg, 1997).

The coping process for the adolescent is particularly poignant, since the young person is confronted with many life stressors and strains for the first time and has not yet developed an adequate repertoire of coping responses on which to draw (Patterson and McCubbin, 1987). The combination of intense energy and minimal experience can lead to intense and extreme reactions (Konopka, 1980). If 'storm and stress' is not an inevitable outcome of this complicated period of change, then the need to develop appropriate and successful coping strategies, to manage issues as they arise (as suggested by the focal model; Coleman and Hendry, 1990) is most certainly a vital part of the process.

Folkman and Lazarus (1980) have suggested a taxonomy of coping that emphasises two major categories - problem-focused and emotion-focused modes. Problem-focused coping refers to efforts to improve the person-environment relationship by changing things, for example, by seeking information about what to do, by refraining from acting impulsively, and by confronting the difficulty. Emotion-focused coping refers to thoughts or actions whose goal is to relieve the emotional impact of stress. These strategies may not actually alter the condition but may help the person to feel better. Examples of emotion-focused coping are avoiding thinking about the trouble or joking about it. Compas (1995) suggests that problem-focused coping is more likely to be used where aspects of the environment are perceived as changeable, whereas emotion-focused strategies are more adaptive when a situation is recognised as uncontrollable. Folkman and Lazarus maintain that a complex combination of strategies are used, dependent upon the conditions being faced, the options available and individual differences. This notion of coping is context-bound, involves effort and is seen as a process that changes over time.

Frydenberg and Lewis (1993) have defined coping as

“A set of cognitive and affective actions which arise in response to a particular concern. They represent an attempt to restore the equilibrium or remove the turbulence for the individual. This may be done by solving the problem (that is, removing the stimulus) or accommodating to the concern without bringing about a solution.” (Page 255)

Frydenberg (1997) explains that there is an infinite number of coping actions that individuals use, which include thoughts and feelings. The strategies include: seeking information, rehearsing what to do, taking chances and trying not to think about the problem. The Adolescent Coping Scale (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1993) is one tool that is used to identify coping strategies. Eighteen strategies are identified, with three overarching styles that represent functional and dysfunctional aspects of coping: *solving the problem*, for example, by working hard and remaining optimistic; *non-productive coping*, for example, worrying or ignoring the problem; and *reference to others*, for example, by seeking social support or professional help. Since the ACS is one of the measures used within this study, it will be discussed further in the chapter dealing with methodology.

Seiffge-Krenke (1993) identifies three modes of coping - *active coping*, *internal coping* and *withdrawal*, which are positioned along the functional-dysfunctional continuum. The categories are not independent of each other, rather, strategies overlap each other. Seiffge-Krenke (1995) also suggests that, in order to gain a clear picture of the coping process, there are four main areas that need to be identified. They are: the nature of the stressors; the internal resources of the individual; the social supports available; and the coping process itself.

Other empirical studies (Ghuman, 1994; Drury, 1991; Shaw, 1988; Breakwell, 1986), refer to a bi-cultural method of coping, that of compartmentalization. This process implies a clear demarcation of boundaries between home and school, or college. Ghuman (1994) suggests that most Asian young people learn to separate situations in their minds and behave accordingly. A variation of bi-cultural coping is illustrated in Wilson (1978) and Ghuman's (1994) research, which found Asian girls using *compromise change*. This strategy involves trying to 'fit in' with the contexts of home culture and that of the wider Western

society. Breakwell (1986) suggests a third coping mechanism, that of *fundamental change* in identity structure. Ghuman (1999) gives the example of Asian girls in the UK giving up hope of a career and independence in favour of seeking self-esteem through becoming a good wife and mother. Stonequist's (1937) theory of the *marginal man* provides a further bi-cultural method of coping and suggests that the pull between two cultural systems may result in excessive anxiety, with possible psychiatric instability. The individual may feel rejected by everyone around and therefore have little sense of belonging. However, cultural diversity is increasingly becoming the norm in Western societies and therefore there are 'softer edges' between cultural communities.

Many key writers (for example, Compas, 1995; Seiffge-Krenke, 1993, 1995; Frydenberg, 1997) point to a sense of personal control as being critical in the coping process, whilst Coleman and Hendry (1999) maintain that coping involves being able to choose to tackle interpersonal issues one at a time. In the multi-cultural context of further education, coping is not necessarily about resolving a situation, or having an active role in controlling which issues are faced, it may be more about how to 'get by'. To the observer, a student trying to grapple with difficulties and tensions may appear to be managing adequately. The very coping process, that of trying to restore and maintain equilibrium, may mask the complexities and high levels of anxiety that the individual is experiencing. For the already stressed tutor, it will undoubtedly be easier to recognise and deal with those who are showing overt signs of difficulty, such as acting out in class and inappropriate behaviour. The underlying difficulties of the 'coper' may go wholly unrecognised.

CHAPTER FOUR

Epistemological Perspective

Introduction

Chapter four presents an overview of the philosophical and epistemological stances that drive the methodology and analysis. A discussion of the post-positivist paradigm is included in this section, leading on to Foucault's (1975) notion of 'Panopticism' and 'Surveillance', as it relates to South Asian young women in the Westernised FE setting. Chapter four then highlights the relevance and importance of Kelly's (1955) Personal Construct Theory and its part in the formation of the methodology. A key influence upon the methodology, and indeed the whole process of the study, came from the notion of 'Emancipatory' research which had its roots in the growth of the Disabled People's Movement (Oliver, 1992a). The final part of this section reviews Corbett's (1998) notion of giving 'voice' to those who would otherwise go unheard, a methodological stance that is central to the exploration of the 'invisible' special needs of Asian young women in FE.

Paradigmatic Stance

Whilst the central discussions about methodology are to be found in the main body of this study, it is helpful to discuss the epistemological orientation to be taken.

Research in the social sciences straddles the positivist and anti-positivist viewpoints. Two generic terms conventionally used to describe these

perspectives are 'normative' and 'interpretive'. The normative model contains two major ideas: that human behaviour is essentially rule-governed and that it should be investigated and measured by methods of natural science, that is, it claims to be objective. The interpretive paradigm is characterised by a concern for the individual, the central endeavour being to understand the subjective world of human experience and to understand that experience from within (Cohen & Manion, 1994). Positivists contend that there is a reality out there to be studied, captured and understood, whilst anti-positivists argue that reality can never be fully conceptualised since there are multiple realities and meanings (Guba, 1990). Positivism and normative approaches may be characterised by a claim that science provides the clearest possible ideal of knowledge. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) suggest that the positive sciences (for example, physics, chemistry and economics) are often seen as the 'crowning achievements' of Western civilisation and it is assumed that 'truth' can transcend opinion and personal bias. Cohen and Manion (1994) point out that, when applied to the study of human behaviour, positivism is less successful

“...where the immense complexity of human nature and the elusive and intangible quality of social phenomena contrast strikingly with the order and regularity of the natural world.” (Page 12)

In their view, positivism portrays human beings as responding mechanically to their environment, whilst the anti-positivist approach focuses upon the individual as having 'free will' and the ability to initiate their own actions. Beck (1979) sums up the purpose of anti-positivism as being to understand social reality as different people see it, and to demonstrate how people's views shape the action they take within that reality.

It is important to add that, whilst positivist methodologies utilise careful measurements to ensure validity, reliability and generalizability, anti-positivistic research also requires a robust approach to ensure meaningful understandings. Further consideration will be given to these issues in chapter thirteen.

It is, then, the subjective, anti-positivist perspective that is to be employed within this study. A humanistic psychological stance underpins the methodological approach whereby people are regarded as positive, active, purposive and

involved in their life experiences (Cohen and Manion, 1994). The interpretive paradigm lends itself to the bi-cultural world of the Asian young woman, and to the many dimensions, both seen and unseen, of the FE college. In adopting the interpretive paradigm, it is hoped that this study is able to go beyond surface details and to dig deeper into the rich descriptions of the social and psychological world of the Asian young woman.

Foucault

Michel Foucault has added much to the philosophical debate. His views sit neatly beside the anti-positivist perspective, since he is highly suspicious of claims to 'universal truths'. As Rabinow (1984) asserts, Foucault does not refute universal truths, rather his response is to historicize grand abstractions, since there is no external position of certainty.

Foucault refers to 'dividing practices', the most famous example being the isolation of lepers during the Middle Ages and the use of hospitals and prisons. Intertwined around the problem of the subject, are terms of 'power' and 'knowledge'. Central to power is the use of discipline and punishment where a

"docile body may be subjected, used, transformed and improved."

(Foucault, 1975, page 198)

Foucault argues that, using the control of space, an individual may be drilled and trained to standardise their actions over time. The 'panopticon' is given as a memorable and stark example of disciplinary power. In a large courtyard are a series of cells surrounding an observation tower. Surveillance of all cells is possible from the tower and the cells become

"small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualised and constantly visible." (Foucault, 1975, page 200)

The inmate is only visible to the supervisor and is cut off from any contact, the surveillance is continuous and anonymous, and no prisoner can be sure when they are being watched. The prisoner thus becomes their own guardian and their

behaviour becomes self-regulated. The panopticon also includes a system for observing and controlling the controllers. As Foucault (1975) puts it, power is not totally entrusted to someone; rather it is a 'machine' in which everyone is caught. Thus the individual is subject to another's control but is also tied to his or her own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge (Foucault, 1982).

The relevance of Foucault's work to the study of Asian young women is focused upon by Haw (1998). The question of freedom, in terms of being able to critically question and reassess our inherited identities, including dealing with 'risk', is posed with reference to Muslim girls. Haw asserts that the *bradari* gaze disciplines the girls, like a Foucauldian panopticon, since they are forever watched by the 'invisible' gaze of their extended kinship group, the members of which are, in turn, watched by each other. The 'gaze' of Western society, including educational establishments and the media, adds to the complexity and intensity of their experience within the panopticon. Foucault comments:

"There are two meanings of the word subject, subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to." (Foucault, 1982, page 212)

This description seems particularly relevant to Asian young women.

It seems then, that the position of Asian girls in Western Society may have clear parallels with Foucault's modes of objectification. The girls are subject to the dividing practices inherent in education systems and bi-cultural societies; they are classified, as well as subjecting themselves to processes of self-formation, and in Foucauldian terms are in spaces where there is 'a field of possible options' (Foucault, 1972).

Kelly: A Psychological Perspective

It is important to say, at the outset, that above all other psychological theories and perspectives, it is the work of Kelly that has had the greatest influence upon my own work as an educational psychologist. Personal construct psychology is

not applied or used in any formal way in this study; rather, it is the underlying assumptions that were ever present in structuring the research, in carrying it out, and in its analysis. The notions of reflexivity and individuality being especially pertinent.

George Kelly's (1955) Personal Construct Theory presents a view that lends itself to the interpretive paradigm. From insights gained in his clinical work as a psychologist, Kelly came to believe that there is no objective, absolute truth and that events are only meaningful in relation to the ways in which the individual construes them. Kelly focused upon the ways in which individuals perceive their environment, the way they interpret what they perceive in terms of their existing conceptions, and the way in which, as a consequence, they behave towards it (Cohen and Manion, 1994). Personal constructs are the dimensions that we use to understand aspects of our world, to predict events and rehearse situations, and, as a result of experiencing the situation, to create alternative constructs.

Underlying Kelly's theory is the philosophical framework of Constructive Alternativism. Kelly argues that there are multiple constructions of reality and that all our present perceptions are open to question, reconsideration and transformation. Kelly suggests that we are all scientists, engaged in making our own unique theories about the world, continually testing out our theories and reconstruing them. A personal construct system is composed of a finite number of dichotomous constructs, and each individual evaluates the phenomena that make up their individual world (that is, people, events, objects, ideas and institutions) and places their constructs on a continuum as if it were bipolar.

Personal Construct Theory is made up of a complex framework but it is the 'individuality corollary' - persons *differ from each other in their construction of events* (Kelly, 1955) - which is particularly pertinent in this context. Bannister and Fransella (1986) give a clear explanation of this:

"It could be argued that the fundamental mystery of human psychology is covered by the question 'Why is it that two people in exactly the same situation behave in different ways?' The answer is of course that they are not in the 'same' situation. Each of us sees our situation through the 'goggles' of our personal construct system. We differ from others in how

we perceive and interpret a situation, what we consider important about it, and what we consider its implications, the degree to which it is clear or obscure, threatening or promising, sought after or forced upon us. The situation of the two people who are behaving differently is only 'the same' from the point of view of a third person looking at it through their own personal construct goggles." (Page 10)

Another dimension of PCT that is highly relevant to this study is the notion of *reflexivity*. This sees the scientist as a person as well as the person as a scientist. That is, 'we are all in this together': the researcher is as much a part of the process as are those being researched. Weinreich (1979) asserts that PCT may be applied in circumstances where there are people from different cultural backgrounds, without violating their differing value systems and world-views. Salmon (1978) argues that research within a personal construct psychology framework would be about the process of making sense of things; it would involve working *with* and not *on* subjects; it would illuminate our understanding of humanity and our search to make sense of life; and would suggest new exploratory ventures.

Kelly's theory enriches the concept of 'perception', and serves to clarify the processes within the interactional model of stress, proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). As the individual appraises his or her environment to determine whether their resources will be taxed, or if they will be endangered, it is the individualistic and unique construct system that is employed. It follows, then, that if the researcher is to make sense of that appraisal, it is necessary to 'enter the other's world' in a reflexive way. It seems that, in entering that world, it is vital that the researcher 'gives voice', without making judgements or persuading the 'other' to their view-point. It is crucial that the researcher comes to the situation wishing to learn and discover in a fluid and creative way, rather than to try to fit what they find into a pre-determined 'absolute reality'.

The final part of this section will explore the notion of 'giving voice' that is to be found within the 'Emancipatory' research process.

‘Voices’ in Emancipatory Research

If, then, this study is to be based upon the notion of ‘reflexivity’, it is important to examine the ways in which that concept might be realised in terms of the research process. As Dyson (1998) contends, research often serves the interests of the researchers themselves, it advances careers and maintains professional position. Dyson suggests that it is appropriate for researchers to become reflexive, that is, aware of how they are enmeshed within the processes, and to undergo a sort of ‘personal purification and reconstruction’ in order to disentangle themselves from internalized, oppressive structures. Barton (1998b) asserts that the research process should involve listening to a variety of voices and, through interacting with others, developing a greater self-understanding. Barton continues,

“For the researcher, recognising oneself as a learner, cultivating a sense of humility in the light of the richness and profundity of the human subject and one’s own limited skills and understandings, appreciating that one’s work is never final or beyond criticism and thus always partial and incomplete, are crucial elements of the critical self-awareness that is being advocated.” (Barton, 1988b, page 31)

The *reflexive* approach is taken up by ‘Emancipatory’ research, which has its roots in Disability Studies, a seminal paper by Oliver (1992a) paving the way towards exposing research itself as being part of social oppression. Oliver argues that a distinction is made between the researchers and the researched; with social relations being built upon the belief that the researchers have specialist knowledge and skills, and it is they who decide what topics should be researched. Oliver contends that the researchers are in control of the whole research process, and defines emancipatory research as ‘the facilitating of a politics of the possible by confronting social oppression at whatever level it occurs’.

Corbett (1998) suggests that one way in which social oppression can be confronted is by the professionals, themselves, learning the art of ‘imaginative listening’, putting all stereotypes aside, becoming receptive, and by encouraging *voice*. Corbett (1996) draws upon research in special educational needs and disability and assumes that some voices are difficult to hear because of a

marginalized social status, among other things. Corbett (1998) suggests that, when professionals speak of empowering people, it tends to be on their terms and using their view of the world.

As an example of 'emancipatory' practice, Corbett (1998) cites research by a team of educational psychologists (Figg *et al.*, 1996) who use techniques from discourse analysis to try to evaluate where they are coming from in terms of their own ways of seeing the world, and how this might differ from the experiences of the children they work with. Corbett goes on to suggest that the professional researcher might be used as an *active accommodator*, whereby the voices of the researched are linked into, and heard by those involved in dominant discourse.

How, then, might emancipatory research and the notion of 'giving voice' be relevant to this study? It seems that the Asian young woman in further education is in danger of being part of a marginalized group, by both ethnicity and gender. In order for the research process in this context to be truly *reflexive*, it is imperative that the voice of Asian girls is heard without social oppression, stereotypical inferences, professional pomposity or prejudices. If this study is to contribute anything, it must do so with respect and honesty; it must do so by making a concerted effort to enter another's world; and by endeavouring to place *listening* at the top of the list of research tools.

PART THREE

Research Methodology

Introduction

Part three provides an explanation as to how the methodological approach evolved. **Chapter five** discusses the process and results of the pilot study. **Chapter six** provides an explanation for the significant methodological changes that were made to ensure that the research questions might be effectively and appropriately addressed.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Pilot Study

Introduction

Before discussing the methodological design and tools used in this study, it is important to point out that the nature and setting of the study itself led the research design and strategies of inquiry. The tools used had to be capable of going beneath the surface and asking complex questions.

It was clear, from my own professional practice and from the available literature that this area of research required a particularly sensitive approach, since it was to be about examining feelings and emotions as well as circumstantial evidence. As the literature review indicated, this group of young women are marginalized by ethnicity and gender, and it was therefore of paramount importance that the research process itself should not exacerbate any difficulties the girls experienced. Initially, a questionnaire and semi-structured interview was used for the pilot study, but these tools proved to be too cumbersome and insensitive to the task in hand. They also failed to provide sufficient data that addressed the research issues. The outcome of the pilot study indicated that it was clearly necessary to rethink the methodological approach to be taken before continuing with the main study.

This chapter will present the methods used in the pilot study, the implications of the pilot results and the ensuing changes made to the methodological approach.

The Pilot Study: Methodology

The aim of the pilot study was: to meet a group of Asian young women who would be able to give insights into what they found stressful at college, at home and in the community; to find out how they coped; what they did and did not find to be the most helpful source of support; and to gauge their views towards the support offered by the college. A secondary aim was to pilot the use of the *Perceived Stress Scale* (Cohen et al., 1983), as well as the '*Adolescent Coping Scale*' (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1993) with a small group of girls. Finally, the pilot study aimed to use an interview schedule with a member of staff, to explore her views of potential stressors for Asian young women, as well as how she perceived Asian girls to be coping in the college setting.

There were several reasons why I started out with a more formal, standardised methodology. My personal experiences, gained from my training as an educational psychologist, led me to believe that it would be necessary to cut out researcher bias wherever possible, whilst using familiar research tools. I realised that the issues to be explored were likely to produce anxieties about maintaining confidentiality and that a more structured setting might enable the girls to 'feel safe'. In using a questionnaire and a follow-up interview based upon the results, it was assumed that the issues could be presented in a clear, concise manner that would go some way to ensuring greater reliability and validity.

Cohen and Manion (1994) suggest that the most practical way of achieving greater validity is to minimize the amount of bias as much as possible. They go on to outline the main sources of bias as being: the characteristics of the interviewer, including attitudes and opinions; the characteristics of the respondent; the content of the questions; a tendency for the interviewer to see the respondent in her own image and to seek answers to support her preconceived notions; misperceptions on the part of the interviewer about what the respondent is saying; and misunderstandings on the part of the respondent about what is being asked.

In the structured interview setting, questions are formulated to ensure that the meaning is crystal clear and the interviewer is left little freedom to make modifications.

In order to be aware of possible bias, it is necessary to acknowledge the perceptions and experiences that the researcher brings to the process. Put differently, this may also be viewed as 'reflexivity'. Cohen and Manion (1994) define reflexivity as

“The way in which in all accounts of social settings - descriptions, analyses, criticisms, etc. - and the social settings occasioning them are interdependent.” (Page 31)

The researcher is thus an integral part of the social setting and, if the outcomes are to be clearly understood, it follows that there should be some degree of transparency about what the researcher brings to the process. It is, therefore, relevant that I should give an overview of my own perspective on what was to be researched.

In my work as an educational psychologist I had often used standardised assessment tools when ascertaining levels of learning difficulties. I had also used a variety of questionnaire approaches, when using a problem-solving model to define a particular behaviour difficulty. Although I had also used open and unstructured interview techniques in my everyday work, for example, in confidential meetings and counselling sessions, the more formal approach seemed to promise greater reliability and validity as well as involving familiar tools. Therefore, during the pilot study, a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was used to form the basis of the interviews held with the Asian young women. It seemed that this method would provide uniformity and an organised way of dealing with the material to be collected, since there was a perceived need to retain tight organisation in response to generating a great deal of data.

It is important that I state my position since my choice of a questionnaire and semi-structured interview was, in part, to try to eliminate researcher bias. I was all too aware that my own experiences had led me to believe that a fundamentalist environment could be repressive. It was inevitable that I would

feel greater empathy for those girls who were struggling with the fundamentalist values of their families and community. I was very aware that my experiences might encourage me to search for evidence that would support my own views. There is great comfort in the quantitative approach since every effort is made to separate emotions from facts. It is ironic that the pilot methodology proved to be too repressive!

Thus it was that, during the pilot study, the young women themselves demonstrated that they needed a 'space' to tell their stories, not a tight structure. The girls taught me that I should create a space for myself as listener and be ready to take on a wide range of perceptions. I was given the opportunity to listen to views that were opposite to my own. For example, in the main study some girls explained that being an Islamic fundamentalist brought them happiness and security; they certainly did not see themselves as victims. Just as I had needed others to accept and respect my own individual values and beliefs, I too was given the opportunity to 'step into another's shoes'. I was enabled to treat with respect those views that were in opposition to my own; I was enabled to listen to alternative perceptions in the same way as I would want my own views to be heard.

My own interpretation of the emancipatory research process is that it is about accepting that, if those researched do not view the world in the same way as the researcher (who may embrace notions of freedom and independence, for example) they do not necessarily want to be 'freed' from their views. Some of the young women made informed choices to stay within their fundamentalist homes and communities, viewing this choice as the gateway to personal happiness and freedom. Allowing the girls to 'tell their story' in their own way both answered the research questions and provided me with a rich and valuable experience. It was clear that, in order to go beyond surface detail, a more open and responsive approach was needed. The pilot study was an invaluable lesson and changed the face of the methodology to be used for the main study.

Organisation and Planning: Questionnaire and Discussion with a Group of Asian Young Women.

Since I had worked with the pastoral team at Piper College for a number of years, access to students was easily arranged. The Deputy Director, with responsibility for pastoral care, suggested that I could meet with a number of Asian young women in the 'girls' hut', a girls' common-room, during lunchtime. The girls were offered informal, weekly discussion sessions by a member of an outreach team who had been assigned to an Asian women's project in the Borough. It was suggested that I arrive before the planned session to meet the girls.

Upon arrival, there were about 15 young women present. Although the girls were to have been told of my involvement, it was clear that not all knew I was coming. Explanations about the research were given, including assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. In all, 12 questionnaires were given out. The intention was for these to be completed prior to a more general discussion based on the contents of the questionnaires. The 'hut' was fairly noisy, with many girls coming and going. Several young women were clearly not comfortable with putting pen to paper and returned the questionnaires uncompleted. After about 15 minutes I engaged them in discussion. In the event only about six or seven seemingly more confident girls became involved in the discussion.

Questionnaire Results

It was clear that most of the girls had chosen not to complete the questionnaire. Out of the 15 young women present, only eight completed questionnaires were returned.

The first seven questions concerning family details were completed in full. The girls were all aged between 16 and 18 years, and their ethnic origin was from Pakistan or Bangladesh. Most girls were taking A-levels, and one young woman

was training to be a nursery nurse. All were born in the UK and all were Muslim, as were their parents.

The questionnaires were helpful in that they were able to draw out clear themes. In college, the young women found college work, examinations and revision to present the greatest sources of stress. Other issues that caused daily worries were listed as: 'separate life from home', 'parents', and 'boy trouble'. The girls thought that college staff did not know about their feelings in relation to these issues and would be unlikely to understand. The girls indicated that at home they found conflict with their parents and a lack of understanding to be most stressful. Some girls expressed the need for more emotional support and advice from their mothers. These responses were expanded upon in the open discussion, with one young woman sharing her experiences of 'having two lives', a theme that was reiterated by many other girls in the larger group interview. Although the questionnaires pinpointed this aspect, it was the discussion that produced a more rich description and explanation.

The questionnaires showed that the girls unanimously agreed that, if they had a personal problem, they would talk to a female friend, cousin or sister. Careers were clearly of great importance and most young women aspired to traditionally high status professions, for example, dentist, barrister, and accountant. Some girls suggested that marriage might hinder their progress.

The questionnaires provided skeleton responses, a few of which were explored further in the discussion. The girls were asked to refer to their written responses as the general discussion was opened up to everyone present.

Interview Responses

I had thought that having a 'script' would enable the girls to feel confident enough to speak. Since, at this stage, I did not know how they had answered the

questions I was unable to probe some of the more interesting written responses. The girls who had not completed a questionnaire obviously felt they were not in a position to join in, thus the discussion was limited to a small number. However, it was possible to follow up a few responses, for example, when asked what she meant by 'parental pressures' one young woman commented

“Well like I am the eldest... they expect a lot out of me... it's like I've got two lives... in college I am more loud than I am at home”.

The entire group of girls joined in when asked if they would ever talk to their parents, with a unanimous shout of “No!”. The same response came when asked if they would talk to staff in college.

The session seemed to be more about responding to the questionnaire than about discussing issues that were of real interest to the girls, until one young woman bravely spoke:

“My parents don't understand about what we have to live with in college... my parents are from Bangladesh... like peer pressure, other influences. We have to keep away from those influences because of our tradition. It's hard... that's something my parents won't understand. There are two different influences, one is at home and one is in the outside. The Western influence outside the home... so whatever you choose to follow, well, I am trying to follow my traditions. It is hard”.

At this point there was a great deal of discussion going on around the room, a few comments made were: “You have to balance”, “It is hard trying to keep everyone happy”, “My parents try to understand but they think back”. The girls seemed to want to talk to each other rather than speak out. The issue of having 'two lives' was central to the girls' discussions about stress and, in their view, it was unlikely that anyone outside their peer group would be able to understand. The discussion became rather stilted and once again focused upon the questionnaire responses before coming to a close.

It was clear from the general chatter and conversation that occurred amongst the young women during the discussion period, that the use of questionnaires and follow-up discussion merely scraped the surface. That is, the girls had much to say but preferred to say it to each other rather than to me, or the group as a

whole. If these young women were to be empowered to 'tell their stories', that is, be enabled to express somehow what was truly important to them and central to their lives, it was quite clear that the methodology would have to be considerably adapted.

The 'Perceived Stress Scale' and 'Adolescent Coping Scale'

The purpose in using these two scales was to give a further dimension to the research, rather than be used as a main research tool. The discussion groups and interviews were to be central to the study, to provide rich, descriptive data, with the scales being used to give additional information.

The Perceived Stress Scale or *PSS* (see Appendix 2) was designed by Cohen et al. (1983) to measure 'the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful'. The 14 items in the scale refer to subjective appraisals of events occurring within a one-month time frame, with higher scores indicating greater levels of perceived stress (Johnston et al., 1995). The scale takes about five minutes to complete. It fits in neatly with the concept of interactional stress, whereby the relationship between the person and their environment is appraised as taxing or exceeding their resources (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

The Adolescent Coping Scale or *ACS* - short form (see Appendix 3) was designed by Frydenberg and Lewis (1993) to be used as a research instrument and a clinical tool to enable young people, in the age range 12 to 18 years, to examine their own coping behaviour. It aims to obtain information on how adolescents cope in different circumstances. The short form consists of 18 items and takes two to three minutes to complete. This scale reflects the concept of coping as an attempt to achieve equilibrium, or to remove the turbulence by solving the problem or accommodating to the concern without bringing about a resolution (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1993). The *ACS* - short form measures the

extent to which the individual attempts to solve the problem, refers to others, or uses non-productive coping strategies.

Administration of the *PSS* and the *ACS*

Although it would have been preferable to administer the two scales at the end of the pilot questionnaire and interview session, in practice this was not possible since the girls involved had to attend lectures. It was clear that a consistent procedure for arranging sessions with Asian young women had to be put in place for the main study. However, I was able to meet with seven girls from an A-level psychology class. This was possible since during the research process that was carried out over the course of a year, I was asked to give several presentations and lectures on 'stress and coping'. I saw this as an opportunity to 'give something back' to the college, in an effort to be reciprocal. It could be argued that psychology A-level students might not be representative of the student population as a whole and efforts were made to ensure that, in the main study, students to be interviewed came from classes taking a range of subjects.

The seven girls were aged between 16 and 18 years and all were born in the UK. Four of the young women were from the Indian ethnic group, two from a Bangladeshi background, and the parents of one girl were from Pakistan. Five girls were Muslim and two were Hindu. They seemed to enjoy completing the *PSS* and *ACS*, which they were able to do within five minutes.

Results of The Perceived Stress Scale

The mean score for the seven young women in the pilot study was 28.43, compared to a mean standardised score of 19.62 (range 0 - 45) given by the

authors (Cohen and Williamson, 1988). Although the authors suggest no specific cut-offs, the girls scores are higher than average.

Results of The Adolescent Coping Scale (short form)

The short form is scored with reference to three coping styles, with five categories (not used at all, used very little, used sometimes, used frequently, used a great deal). The Asian girls' scores were as follows:

Coping Style:	Frequency of Use:	Score Range:	Mean Score:
Solving the Problem:	'Sometimes'	18 - 90	55
Reference to Others:	'Sometimes'	20 - 100	51
Non-Productive Coping:	'Sometimes'	18 - 90	50

Figure 5.1 Results: Pilot Study: Adolescent Coping Scale -short form (N = 7)

It seems that the young women use all three coping styles 'sometimes'. There were, then, no remarkable responses in terms of the scores.

Pilot Interview with a Member of College Staff

The staff member (to be called Ann), chosen for the initial pilot study interview, was from the language and learning support department. Ann was not representative of the staff as a whole, since she spent her time in supporting students with special educational needs. However, it was felt that Ann would provide insights into the lives of Asian young women, since she had established good relationships with many girls. She was also well known to me and it was

hoped that our professional relationship established over several years would enable her to give me honest and open feedback about the interview process at the pilot stage. Ann provided a valuable 'gate-keeping' role into the processes of the college and, at a more basic level, helped in accessing students and staff.

The lessons learned from the student pilot questionnaires and interview, which had taken place some days before, influenced the interview process with Ann. Although the 'Staff Interview Schedule' (see appendix 4) was closely referred to, the process itself was much more fluid, with Ann often focusing upon issues that were of concern to her. Not all the questions on the schedule were posed and the answers to some questions were followed up in greater detail. Questions were used as a guide rather than a more formal interview schedule.

The themes raised by Ann reflected those that had been touched upon by the young women themselves. Ann highlighted the main source of stress for Asian girls as being the apparent conflict between the codes of behaviour expected of them in college and that expected of them at home. The young women themselves had demonstrated to Ann that they were keenly aware of the different expectations. She saw potential stressors as being the worries that the young women might have about life after college, whether that would entail an arranged marriage or if they would be able to go on to their chosen career. Ann also pointed out that parents were often highly supportive and anxious for their daughters to succeed. However, relationships with boys within the college setting seemed to be a source of stress, complicated by protective and 'watching' brothers or cousins. In Ann's view, the girls sought most support from each other, but would need to know and trust a member of staff before asking for help. She felt that the success of the pastoral support system depended upon quick and easy access to a trusting relationship, often with female members of staff; otherwise seemingly anxious young women might be overlooked.

Ann's responses were perceptive and sensitive, with her supportive role placing her in a unique position. I decided to use her comments in the main study too.

Summary of Results from the Pilot Study

The main themes that emerged from the pilot study are summarised in Figure 2, below.

Source:

Theme:	Asian Girls' Questionnaire	Asian Girls' Interview	Staff Interview
Sources of Stress:			
College work/exams	*	*	
Conflict: 2 lives		*	*
Conflict with parents	*	*	
Worries: careers/marriage	*	*	*
Being 'watched'			*
Boys	*		*
Home Chores	*		
Coping Strategies:			
Talk to a female friend	*	*	*
College staff help with work			*
What Might Help:			
Emotional support: family & staff	*	*	
Lighter work load at home & college	*		
Trust known female college tutor			*
Other Themes:			
Parents: unlikely to understand	*		
College staff: unlikely to understand	*		*
Parents: supportive about careers			*

Figure 5.2 Summary of Themes Emerging from the Pilot Study (Main themes: highlighted)

The questionnaire highlighted a number of themes that were repeated in the student interviews as well as the staff interview. Ann and the Asian young women saw the conflict between the 'two lives' of home and college to bring the greatest source of stress. Ann did not mention college work as being a potential stressor, but that might be because those girls she worked with felt supported. It would be important to check this in the main study by asking: do those with special educational needs who receive significant levels of support also feel anxious about their college work? The pilot data revealed the importance of emotional support and that 'talking to friends' was a major source of help for Asian girls. Ann saw the need for staff members, probably female, to offer a trusting relationship built up over time.

Implications for the Main Study

The data stemming from the interviews provided a rich, descriptive source whereby the themes were not only stated, as in the questionnaires, but expanded upon. In order to ensure that the methodological tools used in the main study were able to offer potential for obtaining similarly rich data, a number of crucial issues had to be considered.

The use of questionnaires was not an appropriate method to gain insights into the lives of Asian young women, since the topics and issues central to the lives of the girls needed a deeper mode of exploration. Questionnaires had produced surface level responses. Small group interviews (for example four to six girls), or the option of an individual interview, would go some way towards ensuring that the girls felt less vulnerable than if they were in a larger group. The girls clearly had much to say when in small groups. To ensure that one or two girls did not dominate the discussion, small groups would be preferable. It would be imperative to use an interview schedule as a guide rather than a script, and to allow the girls to take the lead in the discussion, rather than continually ask more

questions, thus ensuring that incidental comments or themes of interest were given space. It would be important also to ensure that the young women were clear about issues of confidentiality and anonymity before taking part, to enable them to feel comfortable enough to respond. It would be necessary to ensure that 'sampling' was carried out across the curriculum areas, and that those with special educational needs were included. It would also be necessary to use a consistent procedure for inviting the girls to take part, including the use of small group rooms where interruptions would be less likely to occur.

There were clear indications that by using a more open style of interviewing it was possible to explore, rather than skim over, the issues that arose. Ann was given a copy of the transcript and asked to make further comments, but she felt that the session had covered all her concerns. This was reassuring in that the interview style had enabled Ann to demonstrate her sensitivity and insights. However, it would be important that the main study included a cross-section of staff, both male and female, and involved those with different amounts of daily contact with Asian girls.

The pilot results of the *Perceived Stress Scale* and *Adolescent Coping Scale* served to show that the seven girls demonstrated high stress scores on the *PSS*, and their responses on the *ACS* indicated that they use a range of coping styles. Since both the *PSS* and the *ACS* take only a short time to complete (five minutes) it seemed that there would be nothing to lose by including their use in the main study since an added dimension might be gained.

The Pilot Study was indeed a salutary lesson. It demonstrated the necessity of placing the young women themselves at the centre of the study, and of ensuring that they led the methodology rather than being 'controlled' by it. For all my efforts at trying to ensure reliability by using a structured approach, it became clear that the sterility of a formalised questionnaire and interview produced superficial and confined responses. When the girls were allowed to 'tell their stories' without being restricted to written responses or interrupted by further questions, they began to reveal the core of what was important to them. This was poignantly demonstrated when, after one young woman had finished telling of

her own experiences, rather than merely reading out her written answer in the questionnaire, the girls erupted into general conversation amongst themselves. They clearly had something to say, yet the structure of the methodology prevented them from doing so. In order to 'give voice' to this group of young women, there had to be a radical change of approach.

If there had been no adjustment to the methodology and tools used for the main study, one could speculate that the outcomes of the research would have been very different. It is possible that the key themes to emerge may have indicated that the girls were the victims of highly stressful situations, left with little support other than each other. This may have been confirmed by the results of the *PSS* and *ACS*. This is pure speculation but it seems that only half the story would have been told, and this group of young women would have been denied a chance to 'tell it how it is'.

CHAPTER SIX

The Main Study

Introduction

Chapter six sets out the methodological approach taken in the light of the pilot study. The chapter begins by examining the effects, in practical terms, that the theoretical models and epistemological perspectives had on the design and implementation of the study. Chapter six outlines the qualitative and quasi-ethnomethodological approach taken and describes the methodological tools and techniques used. The discussion then focuses upon the more practical issues involved in the research process, and includes details about access, permission and the sample itself. Finally, consideration is given to issues concerning research ethics and confidentiality.

Theoretical Models and Perspectives

It was deemed that, if at all possible, the research process should be reciprocal, whereby the girls themselves gained, rather than lost, by being central to the study. The research methodology and design were therefore placed within the framework of perspectives and models that seemed relevant to the unique circumstances of the young women in the study, namely, the emancipatory paradigm, and contributions from Foucault's philosophy and personal construct psychology.

If the emancipatory paradigm was to be represented within the research, it seemed crucial to translate the issues and principles into methodological practice.

This study does not claim to follow the emancipatory paradigm in its 'purist' form; for example, the design did not involve the young women themselves in the structuring and planning stages, rather, it attempts to redress the balance of power between the researcher and researched, and to offer a reciprocal process. The girls themselves were seen at the outset as being 'experts' in their own right, that is, they alone knew the crucial issues. As Barnes et al (1999) suggest, the intention in emancipatory research is to break with the notion of researcher-as-expert and to place the skills and knowledge of the researcher at the disposal of the researched, in this case, the young women themselves. Thus, the methodology attempted to provide a fluid process whereby the young women were enabled to 'give voice' and every effort made to be engaged in 'active listening' (Corbett, 1998), whilst enabling the respondents to lead the interviews. Central to the design were reflexivity and reciprocity, and attempts were made to be aware of, and account for, my own part in the process. Counselling was offered at the end of each interview in an effort to 'give something back'. It was hoped that, if the interviews in any way unsettled the girls, counselling sessions might ensure that they felt supported. It could be argued that the aim of 'scientific' research is not about trying to help those researched. However, one interpretation of the emancipatory approach is that the researcher should attempt to retain an ethical process of respect that where possible, addresses in practical ways the rights of those involved.

Kelly's (1955) personal construct psychology also focuses upon reflexivity, and views the researcher as part of that which is to be researched. The PCP approach suggests that one should try to view the world through the eyes of another, by active listening.

In Kellyian terms, reflexivity is about 'the way the author turned' when involved in the research process. The researcher's own construction of the process is somewhat like an artist painting in the background, onto which those researched place the detail. In order to ensure that the detail reflects as closely as possible the perceptions of those researched, it is vital that 'active listening' takes place. As Kelly puts it,

“We cannot, of course, crawl into another person’s skin and peer out at the world through his eyes.” (Page 42)

However, the research process is about trying to accept another’s way of seeing things *as if* it were our own reality. Since no two people can play precisely the same role in the same event, no matter how closely associated they are (Kelly, 1963), the research process is about listening out for similarities and differences and respecting the reality of them. Kelly goes on to explain that individuals can be found living next door to each other, but be living in entirely different subjective worlds. According to Kelly, each person is choosing explanations that make most sense to them, based on past experiences. Kelly suggests that each person is a scientist, perpetually conducting experiments. An individual creates their own unique template of constructs based on their past experiences and anticipation of events. Experience becomes the process of reconstruing new events. Kelly further suggests that no one need be a victim of their own past nor ‘paint him or herself into a corner’ since there are always alternative constructions of events.

It is vitally important, therefore, for the research methodology to recognize that each person’s construct system is a real world, and that the scientific process, in this context, is not just about the ‘flitting shadows of people’s thoughts’ (Kelly, 1963) that are forever changing. The methodological process is about allowing others to ‘paint in’ their own detail. Kelly suggests that, if the scientist tries to predict and control behaviour, then he or she is in danger of halting the human enterprise in its tracks. In my view, the research process is about dipping into the state of flux that is part of the psychological inner life.

This study endeavoured to ‘give voice’ to the young women involved by enabling them to tell their individual stories. Personal construct psychology offers a way of making sense of the inevitable complexities, differences and similarities in the lives of young women who, on the surface, shared a number of common experiences. It recognizes that the values and beliefs central to some of the young women’s experiences of life have very different import for others. What might be at the core for some may be merely peripheral for others. Furthermore, some core constructs may be impermeable to change and

reconstruction whilst more peripheral constructs may be more pliable and open to change. There are, therefore, an infinite number of ways of construing different, similar or the same events. The aim of the methodological design was to provide a setting in which the young women involved in the study might be enabled to voice what it was like to live their unique lives.

Foucault's contribution to the research process relates to how the researcher attempts to redress the balance of power. In practical terms, this could include 'active listening' and reflexivity. Philosophically, it seems that it is vital for the researcher at the very least to admit to, and explore, his or her own role in the relationship between the researcher and the researched. The image of Foucault's 'panopticon' comes to mind, since the researcher could be 'watching from the tower', surveying the inmates. It seems that, where the research process is not planned and guided by those to be researched, inevitably there will be an imbalance in who controls and holds the research process. During this study, a concerted effort was made to enable the young women to lead the interviews as much as possible, with the researcher providing a starting point and taking a minimal role. This study does not claim to have provided emancipation for the young women it focuses upon, it can only claim to be aware of the issues involved.

Figure 6.1 serves to summarise the influences that the perspectives of the emancipatory paradigm, Foucault and Kelly's personal construct psychology have had upon the research design and methodology.

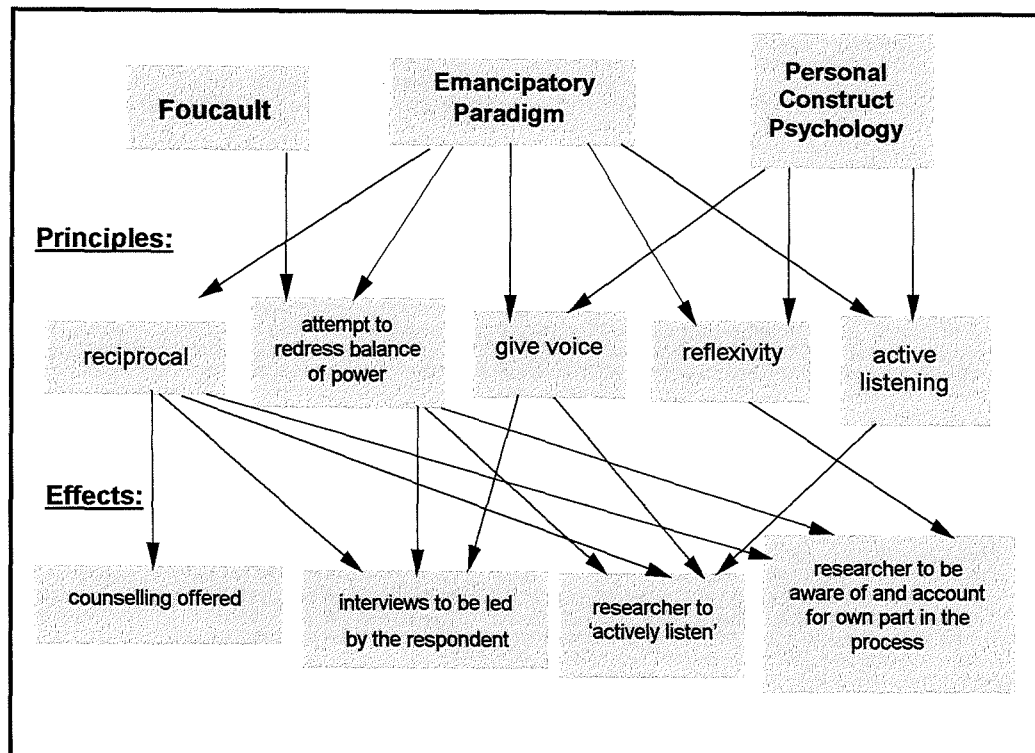


Figure 6.1 Epistemological Perspectives and the Effects Upon Methodology

It could be argued that the influence of three perspectives upon the research design was unnecessarily complicated. However, the topic central to the study is multi-layered. It spans issues about special needs in further education, ethnicity and gender, and looks at how those issues relate to equal opportunities within the context of FE. If this were a study about clearly visible, traditional special educational needs, a more straightforward theoretical model might have been used for the research design. At the heart of this project was the assumption that here was a phenomena that was invisible and hitherto unexplored because the nature of it was highly sensitive and complex. The Pilot study demonstrated that, even to begin to focus upon the patchwork of different emotions, values, beliefs and experiences, it was crucial to use an approach that did more than merely scratch the surface and avoided a stereotypical stance. It seemed that that the emancipatory paradigm, personal construct psychology and Foucault's philosophical perspective at least offered a way in. This study does not claim to have grasped the absolute reality of the lives of the young women it focused upon, merely that it glimpsed at what lay underneath a veil that covered their

lives. Each of the three approaches added to the research process and each had its limitations.

The emancipatory paradigm that emerged from disability studies provides an arena in which those who often go unheard are enabled to speak. In trying to redress the balance of power it endeavours to bring freedom. A danger here is that the researcher makes the assumption that those being researched wished to be freed in some way. There seems to be a notion that the researcher can somehow change lives for the better and improve quality of life. This arrogant approach assumes that the researcher has 'the solutions'. For example, if young women were only given the freedom to reach their academic and personal potential, all would be well. It is difficult to prove that the process or outcomes of any research is truly emancipatory, since the researcher usually stipulates the definition of 'emancipation'. This study provided a memorable lesson in that the stereotypical concepts of young women as 'victims' needing freedom and independence were challenged. As it turned out, not all of those researched wished to be 'freed' from being a part of a group that appeared unable to enjoy the 'freedoms' of Western women. But this is telling the end of the story before it is begun. Another possible pitfall of the Emancipatory approach comes when, having been given the opportunity to participate in the research process, those with louder voices drown out the reticent or silent. At what point does the researcher take control or direct the process to ensure that all views are represented? It seems there is a fine balance between enabling those researched to steer the process, and the researcher herself continuing to play an active and guiding role. The emancipatory paradigm is a relatively new approach to research and comes with both strengths and limitations. It is the intention of this study to make a contribution to its development at a theoretical and practical level, for example, by exploring notions of freedom and dependency. It does not claim, however, to follow a clear and precise 'emancipatory template'.

Personal construct psychology, with its emphasis upon reflexivity, sits neatly alongside the emancipatory approach. It, too, endeavours to bring 'freedom' by respecting and acknowledging that, although two or more people may appear to be living similar lives, what happens in the reality of their psychological inner

lives may be very different. Whilst the emancipatory approach is about 'giving voice', PCP makes a significant contribution in suggesting 'how to listen'. There is, however, a danger that the listener may appear patronising in an effort to be sympathetic, when it may be that no sympathy is required. The reflexive qualities of the theory try to ensure that the researcher questions his or her own part in the process. The danger lies in the researcher getting so caught up in placing themselves in the frame that they fail to ensure that the study is predominantly about the subjects, rather than the researcher's personal journey. It is the 'flavour' of PCP rather than its more structured aspects, for example, the repertory grids often used in PCP research, that are useful in the context of this study.

Finally, Foucault shows how vitally important it is to be aware of the importance of the balance of power, even if it cannot be altered. However, the dramatic and powerful imagery that Foucault offers, for example the 'panopticon', suggests that individuals have very little control over their lives and are unable to make choices. This may or may not be so. Furthermore, in the context of this study, the researcher is in danger of assuming that the young women are in some sort of purgatory. Using Foucault's imagery, who paints the picture of the 'panopticon' and who places people in the cells or in the watchtower, the researcher or the subjects? What is a prison for one may be comforting for another.

The three perspectives used in the design and methodology fit together to form the following research avenues: a way of enabling a hitherto silent and invisible minority group to speak; a way of listening when they do speak; and a way of attempting to ensure that there is an awareness about the relationship between the researcher and the researched, and the inherent issues of power and powerlessness. Although this research approach inevitably has its limitations and difficulties, it attempts to make an original contribution to the exploration of a unique group in an FE setting. In breaking away from the more conventional ways of approaching special educational needs, there is a conscious effort to challenge the stereotypes of what constitutes 'special need' and of what characterises the lived experiences of Asian young women in the UK.

The Qualitative Approach

The discussion that now follows is about the approaches taken and methods used after the pilot study. It is interesting to note that, right from the start, the success or otherwise of the study depended upon responding to the girls themselves. It depended upon listening, ensuring that the young women felt supported and comfortable in taking part, and making their responses as free from constraint as was possible.

The qualitative approach places emphasis upon process and meanings that are not rigorously measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). The study was to be about understanding rather than measuring. Qualitative researchers

“stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry.” (Denzin and Lincoln, page 8)

Miles and Huberman (1994) outline the recurring features of qualitative research:

- Intense and/or prolonged contact with a ‘field’ or life situation.
- The researcher’s role is to gain an ‘holistic’ overview of the context of the study.
- The researcher attempts to capture data on the perceptions of those within the study, through deep attentiveness and by empathetic understanding, suspending preconceptions about the topics under discussion.
- Themes and expressions may be isolated but maintained in their original form.
- A main task is to explicate the ways people understand and manage their day-to-day situations.
- Many interpretations of the material are possible but some are more compelling for theoretical reasons or on grounds of internal consistency.
- The researcher is essentially the main ‘measurement device’ in the study.
- Most analysis is done with words, with recurring themes being organised into clusters.

Although qualitative research is based upon anti-positivist conceptions of reality, it does not represent a unified set of techniques or philosophies. Indeed, the 'recurring features' are interpreted and used very differently within each individual research process. Miles and Huberman go on to assert that there are three main approaches to qualitative data analysis: interpretivism (see for example Dilthey, 1977; Schutz, 1967), collaborative social research (see for example, Schensul and Schensul, 1992) and ethnomethodology (see for example, Cicourel, 1964; Garfinkel, 1967). It is the ethnographic approach that forms the basis of this study.

Ethnomethodology has its roots in social anthropology where the emphasis is placed upon 'uncovering' and 'explicating' the ways in which people come to understand, account for, take action and manage their everyday lives (Van Maanen, 1979). The ethnographer undertakes to experience life from secondary sources and to try to understand others' lives from within - to step into their shoes. By definition, it cannot be objective, since the process of reflexivity involves mutual interdependency between the researcher and the researched. The subsequent analysis of ethnographic studies is about the involvement of the researcher as well as of the researched. The ensuing interpretations are a union of the views of all those involved in the process.

The methodological options available under the 'qualitative umbrella' are numerous. Since the components of any study are unique, it follows that the methodology adopted should reflect the needs of each particular situation. One of the main aims of this study was to glimpse an understanding of the lives of young women who are in a unique and vulnerable situation, and an ethnographic approach seemed to offer both sensitivity and flexibility. Ethnography is about exploration rather than testing, tends to work with 'unstructured data' and often involves a small number of cases, or perhaps just one. Analysis involves explicit interpretation, using verbal descriptions and explanations. The use of quantification plays a subordinate role at most (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998).

The research questions arose out of an intrinsic interest in 'what is going on in this particular college for these particular girls?' The questions did not include other young women in other colleges and whether or not they have similar experiences, although these questions would be interesting and important. Therefore, upon the broad canvas of a qualitative enquiry, using ethnographic exploration, it is helpful also to bound the research in terms of a case study approach.

Yin (1994) defines the *case study* as

“ An empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.” (Page 13)

The case study inquiry uses multiple sources of evidence within a boundary, but with a central focal point. The boundary, or setting, for this research was within one college of further education, namely Piper College, in a northeast London borough. The focus of the study was Asian young women; other sources of evidence were to be drawn from the college staff, college documentation and records, a diary kept by the researcher and informal discussion with those in and around the college. That is, the use of a variety of sources of data, or data triangulation.

Cohen and Manion (1980) draw upon Adelman et al. (1980) when they present a number of advantages to using the case study approach. They suggest the case study is 'strong in reality', in harmony with the reader's own experience, and its strength lies in the subtlety and complexity of the case in its own right. Case studies recognise the complexities of social situations and are capable of offering some support to alternative interpretations. This approach is also able to provide data that is open for re-interpretation; it can help lead to action and allow the readers to judge the implications of the studies for themselves.

Criticism levelled at the case study approach focuses upon its allegedly weak measures for reliability and validity. Yet the case study is a way of gathering reflective, rich descriptions that present a unique view into real life conditions that are of intrinsic interest. Janesick (1998) asserts that validity in qualitative

research has to do with description and explanation and whether or not the explanation is credible. It is about learning from the particular rather than trying to generalise. Janesick presents a strong argument for the case study standing solidly on its own merits, with its uniqueness being at the centre. She goes on to state,

“Consequently, reliability in the traditional sense of replicability is pointless here.” (Page 51)

The qualitative approach is about uncovering meanings of events in individuals' lives, about having a passion for people, communication and understanding (Janesick, 1998).

It was clear from the pilot study that the Asian young women themselves wanted to be understood, not within a quantitative measuring structure but in an environment where they were not constrained and were free to speak their mind. Having learned this lesson, the tools necessary for the main study were to be used within the qualitative context.

The Methodological Tools

The research questions posed at the outset did not ask how much stress the girls experienced, although the PSS addresses this question to some extent; rather, the questions were about perceptions and understandings. The tools used were therefore required to 'get to the core' of these matters, without necessarily measuring them. Questionnaires were to be abandoned in favour of exploratory, depth interviews with both students and staff. The staff interview schedule (Appendix 4) was to remain unaltered, but the questions were to be used as probes, with the interviewee leading the way. It was envisaged that not all listed questions would be asked and answered in any one interview. In the main study, the young women were to be asked to briefly write down information about their age, ethnicity and religion (Appendix 5) before moving on to the interview. Once again, the girls were to lead the interviews, with the researcher's probes to be used when necessary (Appendix 6). After consideration, it was decided that the

use of the *PSS* and *ACS* might offer an extra dimension, although the scales were to take a minor role in the study. College documents indicating incidents, enrolment and retention figures would be examined and a diary and field notes were to be kept. It is helpful at this point to examine the strengths and difficulties in the use of exploratory interviews.

The Exploratory Interview

Oppenheim (1992) suggests that the exploratory or depth interview is not an ordinary conversation. It is about the development of ideas and is concerned with trying to understand how people think and feel about the research topics. The task of the depth interviewer is thus not of data collection but ideas collection. The primary objective is to maintain spontaneity. However, Kvale (1996) purports that the interviewee's statements are not collected; rather, they are co-authored by the interviewer. Kvale goes on,

“The inter-view is an inter-subjective enterprise of two persons talking about common themes of interest. The interviewer does not merely collect statements like gathering small stones on a beach...the interviewer's active listening and following up on the answers co-determines the course of the conversation.” (Page 183)

Kvale maintains that the exploratory interview is concerned primarily with being sensitive to the subjects' lived world, and the knowledge gained can be used to enhance the human condition. The interview process is therefore a journey, and one in which both the researcher and the researched end up at a different point from where they started. As the story unfolds, it is essential to adapt the research tools to the process. In this study, the young women increasingly led the focus of the interviews and were thereby enabled to 'tell their story'. It was necessary for me, the interviewer, to reduce my role to an absolute minimum.

The role of researcher in the exploratory, unstructured interview is far from easy, since the topics are often emotionally loaded and a great deal of skill is required to encourage open and lucid responses (Oppenheim, 1992). At most, the

interviewer may have an agenda of issues to be explored. Added to this are considerations about the location and environment in which the interview is conducted, the need to ensure confidentiality and anonymity and to establish rapport.

Cohen and Manion (1994) discuss the unavoidable features of the interview situation that would normally be regarded as problems. They cite Cicourel's (1964) list as follows: factors such as mutual trust, social distance and the interviewer's control, differ from one interview to another; the respondent may feel uneasy and adopt avoidance tactics if the questioning is too deep; both the respondent and the interviewer are bound to hold back part of what is in their power to state; many of the meanings that are clear to one will be relatively opaque to the other, even when the intention is genuine communication; and it is impossible to bring every aspect of the encounter within rational control (Cohen and Manion, 1994, page 275).

Thus, no matter how hard the interviewer tries to be objective, the interpersonal transactions will have features of everyday life, such as bias. The more rigid and structured methodology used in the pilot study was an attempt to avoid bias and my own likely tendency to seek answers that supported preconceived notions, for example, that 'young women in families where fundamentalist views are held may be subject to repression'. Kitwood (1977) believes that there are no 'good' or 'bad' interviews but rather social encounters. It is more helpful, therefore, to examine the appropriateness, or otherwise, of the constructs and the theories that are used to examine, analyse and explain the phenomena.

Kitwood (1977) takes up the issue of the 'human element' in establishing rapport and asserts that putting the respondent at ease is necessary to the validity of the encounter. In my past experience as an educational psychologist I had learned that rapport is an essential part of any communication, especially where people may feel vulnerable, anxious or in a situation where they feel powerless. I had begun the research process by using what I thought were the 'correct' research tools, in the belief that the structure may have enabled the young women to feel less threatened in a more 'scientific' setting. Yet, as time went on, I realised that

what I had learned in my professional practise held true in this particular research setting. It may be said that my role as researcher became diffused with my previous role as an educational psychologist, that is, I reverted to what felt most comfortable: I conducted exploratory 'open' interviews and offered counselling. This may be so, but I intuitively felt that these young women were not going to respond unless there was the establishment of trust and rapport, and unless they felt safe. The offer of counselling, outside the research process, was to ensure that I did not leave them feeling more vulnerable than before. These features were as much about ensuring that there was an ethical response to the needs of the girls as they were about attempting to answer the research questions.

Kitwood (1977) reflects that, the more the interviewer becomes rational, calculating and detached, the less likely the interview is to be perceived as a friendly transaction, and the more calculated the response also is likely to be. Kitwood challenges the traditional concepts of 'reliability' and 'validity' and maintains that, where the interviewer attempts to increase reliability by having greater control over the elements within the interview, this is achieved at the cost of reduced validity. That is, in order for people to disclose aspects of their thoughts, feelings and values, they have to feel that they are in a human situation, rather than a scientific experiment. Thus, the traditional notions of reliability and validity become redundant, since every interpersonal situation may be said to be valid (Kitwood, 1977). This being the case, the methodology used attempted to ensure that every effort was made to create a 'human situation'. It was felt that the most valuable way of checking validity was to ensure that the interviewer got as close as possible to the 'essence' of the lives of the young women in the study. The next section gives an overview of the attempts at using practical ways of ensuring a 'human situation' within an emancipatory paradigm.

Practical Issues

Several strategies were adopted in an effort to address issues about reliability and validity and to ensure that the process was, where possible, reciprocal. These were as follows:

- All young women who took part in the study did so on a voluntary basis, with confidentiality and anonymity assured. They were not selected on the basis of apparent stress.
- The young women were from a sample that was representative of both academic and vocational courses.
- The young women were able to 'self-select' the interview groups, that is, they were able to choose friends that they felt comfortable with. Some girls chose to be interviewed alone.
- The interviews were led by the respondents themselves and had minimum intervention from the interviewer.
- During the process of the interviews, the researcher checked her understanding of what had been discussed with the young women, for example, by summarising what had been said and asking, 'Have I got that right?'.
- A random selection of staff were asked to check the transcripts of their individual interviews and add comments and or corrections (see Appendix 7). Transcripts of the student group interviews were not given back to the girls for validity checks since confidentiality could not be assured. The young women would have had written evidence of each other's views, with the risk that those outside the interview group might see the transcript.
- Random selections of student transcripts (where anonymity was retained) were given to two female Asian educational psychologists, one male educational psychologist (non-Asian) and one male (not in the profession of education). Feedback was asked for in terms of themes to aid validity in the analysis.
- At the end of each interview session, the students were offered counselling. This was to be confidential, free of charge and outside of the research process.

It was hoped that the emancipatory approach would be able to create a sense of freedom and protection. These features were crucial when the voices of the young women at the centre of the study had hitherto not been heard. The pilot study taught that hard-edged, 'scientific' methods of enquiry, while promising greater reliability and validity in traditional terms, would have been used at the expense of the possibility of touching upon reality and learning from it.

The Methodological Process

Access and Permission

Permission had been granted for a small poster and attached slips to be displayed in the common room. Those who wished to be involved were to complete a form and return it to the reception area for collection (see Appendix 8). After two weeks, no forms had been returned and the method for gaining access had to be changed.

I was invited to attend a full staff meeting, with almost one hundred staff present, in order to outline the study and ask if tutors would give me permission to attend their tutorial sessions to talk to the students. Each student at Piper College is assigned to a tutorial group. Following my talk at the staff meeting, a notice was pinned up in the staff room asking for tutors to indicate if I could join their tutor periods. Staff were also asked to indicate if they would be willing to be interviewed about their own views. As a result, 25 staff members gave permission for me to talk to their students and seven indicated that they would be willing to be interviewed themselves.

The staff that had given permission for me to enter their tutorial sessions were self-selected. That is, I was not able to attend classes that represented a cross-section of the college. As it turned out, the students that I eventually interviewed

did come from both academic and vocational courses, but this was by default rather than by design.

Having arranged with the tutors to join their groups (see Appendix 9), an outline of the study was briefly presented to the students. I asked for volunteers from Asian young women in the first instance and, at a later date, from young women from other ethnic backgrounds. Sheets were passed around for the girls to sign; this ensured that they were able to join groups with their friends or to indicate that they wished to be interviewed alone (see Appendix 10). Convenient times and dates for interviews were arranged and letters of confirmation given out by the end of the session (Appendix 11).

Access to a cross-section of staff, from directors to tutors and non-teaching staff, was more problematic. Only seven staff had signed the sheet agreeing to be interviewed. Furthermore, all but one of the seven staff that volunteered for personal interviews were female. After social conversations over coffee in the staff room, nine more staff members agreed to be interviewed. Follow up letters were sent (see Appendix 12) to confirm interview arrangements. 12 of the staff were female (2 of whom were Asian) and four were male (3 of whom were Asian). Finally, a *Statement of Working Practise* (see Appendix 13) was written and signed for college records.

The Sample

It is important to state at the outset that the sample of both students and staff was self-selected. Not all young women agreed to be interviewed, leaving one wondering what the stories of the silent girls might have been. The staff were clearly not representative of the academic groups and had a heavy female bias (12 women to 4 men). Of the 16 staff members interviewed, five were of Asian ethnic origin (3 male and 2 female). It was interesting to note that tutors from the sciences were under-represented, as were those who taught business and computer studies. Most of the staff members who were interviewed had known

me in my capacity as educational psychologist for the college. Interestingly, the men in senior or managerial positions agreed to be interviewed after social conversation rather than agreeing at the outset. Sixteen staff interviews (including 1 pilot interview) were carried out in private, one-to-one sessions.

The student sample amounted to 54 Asian young women (including 15 in the pilot study), who were to be interviewed in 16 separate sessions. The girls' ethnic origins were from Pakistan (26), Bangladesh (16) and India (12), and their religious backgrounds were Muslim (48), Sikh (2) and Hindu (4). Also included in the group were four Asian girls with identified special educational needs. Three Asian girls elected to be interviewed alone. In order for comparisons to be made, 14 non-Asian young women were interviewed in four separate sessions. The ethnic origins of the non-Asian girls were from the UK (8), Portugal (1), Ghana (1), Nigeria (1), Jamaica (2) and Greece (1). Their religious backgrounds were Christian (11), African spiritualism (1) and atheist (2).

The *Perceived Stress Scale* was completed by 64 Asian young women and 48 non-Asian girls. The *Adolescent Coping Scale* was completed by 45 Asian girls and by 23 non-Asian. During the initial pilot interviews, nine Asian young women were not able to complete the *ACS* since they had to leave the session early to attend lessons. All girls interviewed completed a *PSS*, as did a number of others outside the interview situation. The sample sizes for these scales are therefore irregular since time did not always allow for both scales to be used on each occasion by all groups. In an effort to be reciprocal, I agreed to give a number of lectures (free of charge) for the psychology and the careers department. I was able to use the *PSS* and *ACS* as part of my presentation.

All interviews were carried out in private rooms, which could not be overheard. With the permission of all respondents, all the interviews were taped.

The time-scale of the study was over one academic year. Interviews were conducted between October 1997 and July 1998.

Research Ethics and Confidentiality

Issues surrounding research ethics and confidentiality are also fundamental to the design. As a member of the British Psychological Society, it was appropriate for me to adhere to the *Code of Conduct, Ethical Principles and Guidelines* (BPS, 1998). In particular, the guidelines highlight the principles of obtaining consent, after having taken all reasonable steps to ensure the participants have understood the nature of the investigation and its anticipated consequences; and the importance of ensuring that the identity of the participants (including organisations) is not revealed without expressed permission (pages 2 – 3, BPS, 1998).

Each interview session started with an explanation of the study. The young women were told about the offer to be made to college staff about feedback of results (with anonymity preserved), and were given details about where the study would be written up. Care was taken, before the interviews started, to ensure that all girls felt comfortable with the process and were confident about the preservation of their anonymity. The sensitive nature of the study made it imperative to ensure that clear explanations were given since it was vital that the young women did not feel compromised or unsafe in any way.

PART FOUR

Presentation of Findings

Introduction

Chapters seven to eleven present the findings of the study. **Chapter seven** presents the most crucial part of the findings. This chapter allows the Asian young women to give accounts of their experiences of stress. It includes the comments of Asian girls with identified special educational needs, and those of comparative groups of non-Asian girls. **Chapter eight** gives accounts of how Asian young women attempt to cope. The experiences and coping strategies of Asian girls with identified special educational needs are once again included as well as the views of comparative groups of non-Asian girls. **Chapter nine** introduces the FE college context and staff express their views about the nature of stress, that they perceive Asian young women to experience. Data from college attendance and incident records are also included. **Chapter ten** focuses upon staff views about how Asian young women attempt to cope with stress. This chapter will refer to the complex interplay between the college system of support and the Asian young women's response to it. **Chapter eleven** discusses the stress and coping experiences of college staff. Particular reference will be made to the impact that the college system has on teachers and the lives of the Asian girls at Piper College. Attempts are made to make reference to the analytical and theoretical model throughout part four.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Experiences and Expressions of Stress

Introduction

This chapter gives a glimpse into the lives of Asian young women in their homes and community, as well as at Piper FE College. The first section focuses upon the experiences of Asian young women at home; the daughter's role and her relationships with family members are discussed. There are also reflections on the role of brothers in the family, and the girls' views on their parents' aspirations for their future. This section includes the girls' thoughts on marriage, boys and careers. The chapter then moves on to the young women's perceptions of the Asian community. Finally, examples of experiences in Piper College are presented, including the young women's thoughts on workloads and their relationships with staff and other students. The comments of Asian young women with identified special educational needs are then focused upon as a way of exploring the notion of visible and invisible needs. The experiences and expressions of stress of non-Asian girls are then presented by way of comparison. An overview of the symptoms of stress displayed by Asian young women, at home and in college, is then presented. Three case study 'vignettes' are included, the purpose being to provide a glimpse into the day-to-day lives of three girls who experience different levels of stress: high, moderate and low. The chapter then presents the results of the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al, 1983). Finally, with reference to the analytical model, theoretical implications are discussed.

All names have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

The computer software package NVIVO, (designed by a development team including Richards, Richards, Barrington, Fraser and Taylor, for Qualitative Solutions and Research, 1999) was used throughout the data analysis. Figure 7.1 shows a graphic model (using NVIVO) of the themes that emerged from the interview transcripts.

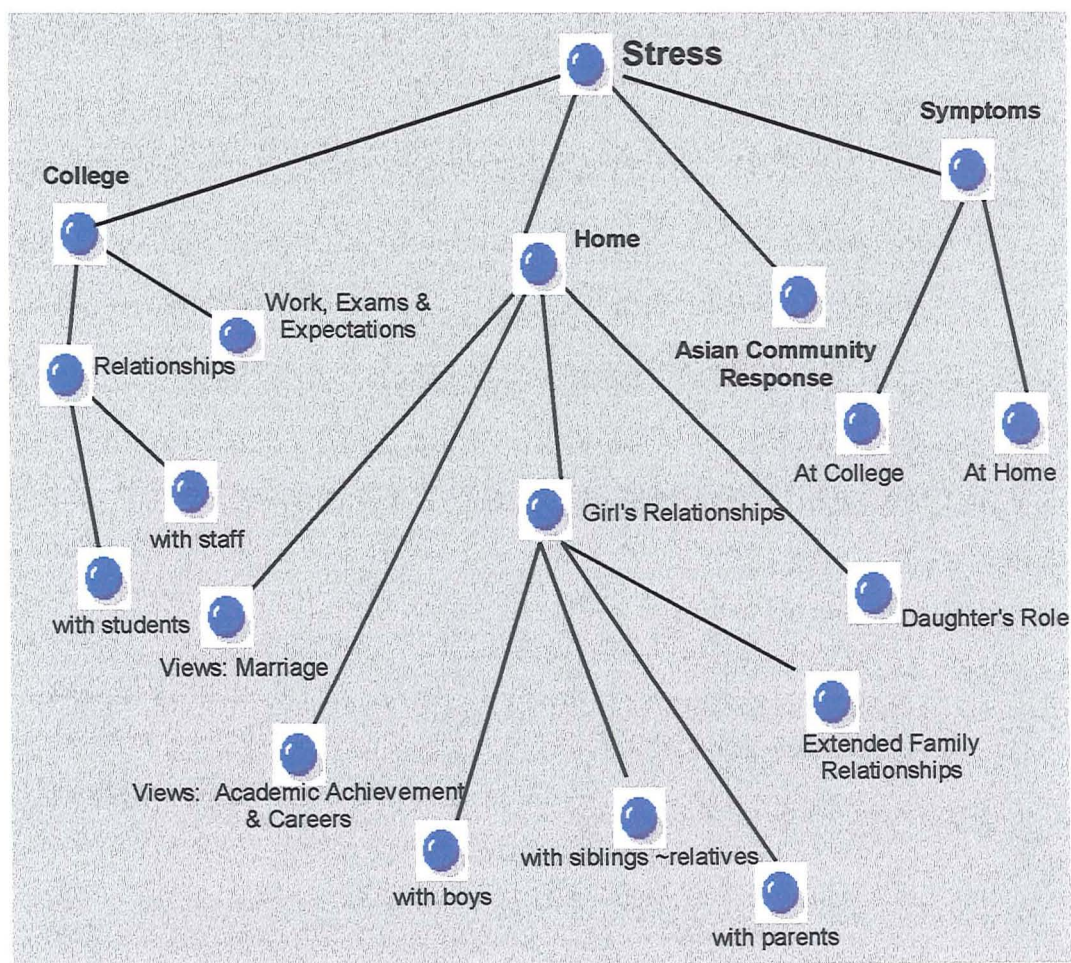


Figure 7.1 Graphic Model of Emergent Themes: Asian Girls' Experiences and Expressions of Stress

Asian Young Women's Experiences and Expressions of Stress

At Home

The Daughter's Role

One theme that quickly established itself was that of the daughter's role at home. There seem to be clear boundaries and 'norms' as to what is expected of a daughter. When asked how a 'good daughter' might behave, Fozia replied,

"To be able to cook and clean. You would be wicked (successful) at all your studies, be really polite to everyone, really quiet to everyone."

Fozia's friends supported this notion and she added that, if ever her mother was not at home, a 'good daughter' would act as a substitute by doing the housework and looking after younger sisters and all brothers. They spoke of balancing college work and homework, as well as maintaining Muslim practises, for example, praying five times a day. Prabia said that "Just being your parent's daughter" brings with it a special responsibility and added,

"We should always know better... we were born to be like this... a daughter should always lower her voice."

It was apparent that those with low levels of perceived stress were 'accepted for who they were' and felt that they were not simply cast in the 'Cinderella Role' of cooking and cleaning. Rehana put it:

"At home I am still the same... Mum doesn't expect me to do things that a lot of girls have to do... my Mum just wants me to do good at school... she just wants all us kids to do well at school... it's like, you are here in London, you have got good opportunities you should make the most of it ... I help you know... but she doesn't expect me to be a certain person at home ... she knows that I am the same person at home as I am in college."

Clearly Rehana does not feel the need to make changes in her behaviour when moving between college and home, and she feels her Mum wants the best for her.

Dress was also described as being an important part of the daughter's role, with the scarf or *hijab* (veil) being an outward sign of conforming to requirements. It seemed that those who experienced low stress with regards to dress were happy to wear traditional clothing for example, shalwar kameez (trousers and a long shirt) or wore Western clothing without fear of rebuke. High levels of stress seemed to be bound up with the presence of fear. Shareena tells this story:

"When I was about 12 years old my religious leader saw me without a scarf and he actually beat me... he came round our house... I was shocked... I wore it not because of what it means but because I was scared of that man."

The girls who experienced moderate levels of stress seemed to be without fear but were disgruntled that they were not able, in their view, to take a 'middle road' if they made sure that they "stuck to the rules". Shazia commented,

"Other people have part-time jobs, go to uni, go out etc... wear what they want... not tight-fit clothes or anything... stick to the rules... there is nothing wrong with what they are doing... why can't we be like that?"

The issue of independence repeatedly arose. As the literature review indicated, the traditional Asian family often adheres to a *collectivistic* philosophy where the well-being of the family is of paramount importance rather than the promotion of individual independence. Where there was little evidence of stress, the young women often shared the collectivistic values of their parents or were allowed and encouraged to seek independence. Once again, the deciding factor between moderate and high stress seemed to be bound up with fear. Some girls expressed dissatisfaction at not being allowed the privileges that their Western peers were granted, for example, being able to go to clubs or parties. Shirin described her feelings:

"Other girls, not Asian girls ... they can go out and do what they want, they can go home, go out with their friends, but I can't do that... I'm not allowed to do that, not even on a weekend... I have to go everywhere she (Mum) goes, like friend's house, families' house, I can't do anything on my own, I have to be with her."

Where there was evidence of extreme anxiety amongst the girls, there was some form of fear. At times there was fear of total loss of freedom connected with "being a precious thing", an Asian daughter. Asma described "being locked up inside" and Sadia, who eventually left her home and community, spoke of her

terror at being made to do everything in the home saying, “I wanted my life too... you know what I mean”.

In listening to the girls it became obvious that the experience of being an Asian daughter brings with it clear expectations. One expectation is that the family will protect and look after their girls. It is seen to be the duty of the family and community to protect their daughters. Daughters traditionally uphold the *izzat* or honour of the family and as such they are precious. This was deemed to be highly stressful for some whilst for others it is comforting and protecting. Aysha said,

“I think they’ve got that nurture... they protect you... keep you away... my parents understand that my schoolwork comes first.”

The support of the family structure and a clear life plan, including arranged marriage, was for some girls what they most wanted. They viewed their role as being of paramount importance to the family and community as a whole, and felt privileged to carry the *izzat*. Those who experienced high stress viewed this responsibility as an infringement of their freedom. Several girls expressed their worries at being subject to the decision-making processes of the extended family, with deliberations about whether or not they would be allowed to continue their education after college, being carried out without taking into account their wishes. For some families it is the husband who has the right to a career, since he is “more higher class”. Nadia was grateful for the support of her family to “get an education” and added that she felt lucky because

“I tell you, there are some girls who after their GCSEs aren’t allowed to study, they get married and their parents say, stay home and cook... clean and have your five kids.”

For her, Nadia’s liberal parents were the key to maintaining low levels of stress.

Relationships with Parents

When it came to relationships with parents, 'trust' was the single most important factor determining the level of anxiety experienced. Where girls felt their parents trusted them, they reciprocated and 'stuck to the rules'. Harmeet put it,

"My parents are quite liberal, they let me do what I want, as long as I stick to their rules and regulations... (Harmeet's friends nod in agreement). I have got a curfew, but I don't even go out that much because I have been studying for my A-levels. They are quite lenient with me because they know I am not going to get into trouble."

Sofina added that her parents are very protective but that they do not stop her from going out. Low levels of stress were very apparent where parents and daughters were honest with each other and where the girls felt respected and trusted. Being 'treated like an adult' was a comment that was repeated several times by those girls who experienced little anxiety at home.

Some young women said that they felt they were treated 'like a child' at home.

Aysha voiced one reason for this:

"They compare you to other people and that's why this has happened. They see other girls... they think why should they trust her? If girls say they are going to the library, most girls aren't going to the library."

It seemed that the behaviour of other girls in the close community or extended family had a direct impact upon how parents viewed their own daughters.

Shahina was indignant, saying,

"They should trust you as their daughter not as what everyone else is."

The nature of the relationship between parents and daughters seemed to be of pivotal importance in determining the levels of anxiety experienced by the girls. The greater the trust, the more the daughters said that they tried to 'live up' to that trust. However, the relationships described between mother and daughter and father and daughter, had further impact upon the amount of tension experienced by the girls.

Within the Asian family, it is to the mothers that the girls are often expected to look for a role model. For some young women, one significant difficulty stems from the differences between their own and their mothers' early adult experiences. Many mothers were either first generation immigrants or had grown up in their country of ethnic origin. For some mothers the notion of independence, in the form of a college education and a job, was not perceived to be part of the Asian female role. Many girls recognised the difficulties their mothers had adjusting to this. Rumana put it:

"She's got her own problems as well. Like it is totally different for me... she would remember how it was for them, they grew up differently. She wouldn't understand. She doesn't know what I am doing here."

Those who talked about the close relationships they had with their mothers revealed that they had an openness whereby, even if there was disagreement, they were at least communicating. Once again the notion of trust was of paramount importance to maintaining low anxiety. Shahida described her relationship with her mother as open, going on to say,

"With my Mum she knows me and we are close, so I just tell her. If she says I have got to think differently, well tough! She says, 'I believe you', but she thinks I am too soft or innocent (with boys)."

Where there was evidence of little or few tensions between mothers and daughters, there seemed to be a clear understanding, on the part of the mothers, as to how life might be for the girls. In some cases, it was the mother who encouraged a bi-cultural approach for her daughter. Farah told of her mother's involvement:

"My mum sent me to a mixed school on purpose because I come from a family with all sisters... so she knows I mix with boys, but if I am linked to a boy romantically then that's it."

Once again the daughter is given some freedom and in return she is expected to act within the remits of her role within the family. In the case of one girl, Amena, it was her mother who was actively encouraging her daughter to give up traditional female apparel, although Amena herself seemed reluctant, commenting, "My mum actually encourages me to get out of my scarf, she says I look old!"

Although the traditional role of the Asian father is often perceived as being one of 'holding and implementing the family values', some girls spoke of enjoying close relationships with their fathers. Many young women spoke of their fathers as having the dominant role within the family. It was to their fathers that the girls had to go for permission and guidance as to what was appropriate for them. Many girls spoke of their fathers being lenient and understanding 'under the circumstances'. Shahina told of how she was worried that her dad would never let her work but how he had recently mentioned that she could get a job over the weekends. She added that she was plucking up the courage to ask her father for permission to apply to university. Although many girls said that their fathers would be the 'last person they would talk to' about their problems, some indicated that their fathers could be 'persuaded' to be flexible. Ghazala suggested that

"It depends on how educated your parents are, how they have been brought up... like if they have been brought up saying the girl has to stay inside then they are going to bring up their kids like that as well. My Dad didn't want me to come to college, whereas my Mum did... so we just had to persuade him. He just wanted me to stay at home." (Laughter from Ghazala and her friends)

Where girls had a hard time 'persuading' their fathers to be more lenient or where there was little or no communication between them, there was evidence of greater tension. Most of the girls interviewed said that their father would be the person least likely to understand or empathise. The response seemed to be either a 'retreat' into silence and further anxiety or a running battle. Dalia, whose father is a Hindu priest, described the turbulent relationship she has with him and said,

"He has opinions on everything... I shouldn't have my own opinions on anything. I was born in this country and I have my own opinions. I am a bit modernised, Westernised, he just totally contradicts everything I say. We are constantly arguing."

She continued,

"I have got my own opinions and they are staying that way. I am not going to listen to what he is saying".

Dalia was adamant that she is not prepared to change her opinions on any level. She was clearly experiencing a high level of stress and indeed had asked for an

individual session in which to discuss her experiences. Both Dalia and her father, in Dalia's view, were entrenched in their opposing positions.

It seemed that the degree of anxiety and stress increased greatly where there was little or no flexibility on the part of fathers and daughters. Where some attempt at understanding the situation of the other was made, the level of stress seemed to be at least tolerable.

Relationships with Siblings and Other Relatives

During the interviews, 'sisters' were hardly mentioned, unless in the context of their responsibility to care for younger siblings. However, 'brothers' were often an integral part of conversations about home life. Girls who appeared to be relaxed and stress-free often saw brothers as taking a protective role, making sure that their sisters were safe. Surinder spoke of her parents expecting her brothers to look after her. When Surinder's friend, Rahina, spoke of her worry about men being present at the post office where she had to pay bills, Surinder said that her brothers would carry out all such tasks. Some girls saw the 'protective role' that their brothers had as infringing upon their freedom. Farah, who had an 'illicit' boyfriend, explained that her brother disapproved and used his knowledge as a constant threat, that is, he could tell her parents of her boyfriend if he chose to. Those girls with moderate to high stress saw their brothers as having an advantageous role in the family. They felt that, in contrast, the girls in their family were treated unfairly. Aysha explained,

"It's a punishment... if a girl does this... it's the end of the world ... if a guy does this there's always a reason... they ask why... but with us, we should always know better. We were born to be like this."

This theme was picked up by Harmeet, who spoke of the effect that her brother's actions would have on her life. Since Harmeet's parents were separated, it would be the duty of her brother to live with her mother. However, if her brother decided to move out and live separately with his wife, it would be Harmeet's responsibility to stay and look after her mother. Young women, who appeared to

be highly anxious, viewed their brothers as 'spies' who 'don't do anything' to help. These girls saw their brothers as taking on the 'dominant masculine' role of putting family values into practice. Two girls said that their brothers were deeply religious and were 'putting pressure' on them to be also. Interestingly, the same girls said that they thought,

"In white families they make the boys do something, they make them cook, my brothers never heard of cooking."

Since these anxious girls did not have 'white' girl friends with brothers, there had been no opportunity for them to investigate their assumptions.

In some families, where the father had died or left, it was an older brother or another male relative who took the dominant role. Fatima's story illustrates this. Fatima's father had died in India, when she was a small child, and her father's brother assumed the role of family protector. Fatima dreaded his visits (from India) since she said it inevitably meant that her behaviour would be criticised and her freedoms curtailed. She says,

"I went mental, I went loony, I didn't like him... I can't stand him. It's like my Mum lets me do things and then he didn't like the fact that my Mum lets me do things. So when he stayed at our home he tried to change things for me."

Young women experiencing lower levels of stress seemed to enjoy a close relationship with their sisters or female cousins. There seemed to be a special bond between them where secrets were told and kept. This will be discussed further in the 'Coping Strategies' section. In contrast, the girls who seemed most anxious did not enjoy positive relationships with female relatives. In Sadia's case, she was the youngest of eight girls and was expected to succeed where her sisters had failed. Sadia explained that her mum thought that she would "turn out really good and not turn out like everyone else who is Westernised". Where girls had close relationships with their female relatives they did not experience isolation but a protective bond of understanding.

Extended Family Relationships

The girls described not only their relationships within their own families but also the relationships of the extended family. Rajida, who described stressful experiences in her family, spoke of the blame that was placed upon her mother and the children when her parents divorced. It seems that the intensity of close extended family relationships that are perceived to be positive and supportive in 'low anxiety families', can also bring tensions. Shazia described the complicated relationships in her house where her two brothers and their wives, and their children, live along with Shazia, her parents and siblings. Shazia told of violent fights between her brothers. She said,

"No-one says anything in my house. I talk to Mum but I don't talk to my brother, I don't talk to my sister-in-law. I talk to my other brother ... my sister (who is married and lives with her husband's family) hasn't come round the house for ages, she doesn't want to talk to anyone."

The collectivistic responsibility for family happiness, that provides a secure and supportive family network and is so valued and appreciated by many Asian young women, seems to have a 'flip-side' that is at times perceived to be invasive and stressful. With a collectivistic approach, it is the duty of all family members to look after, and be aware of, each other's needs. Many girls found this experience to be of enormous comfort, but even those with positive family experiences felt anguish over family members who were too far away to help.

Fatimah spoke of her worries for relatives and friends in Bangladesh:

"It is difficult for people from Bangladesh to watch what is happening back home ... it makes me think that you are living here and part of your family is over there suffering. We've got everything here, we don't even think about it."

Rehana echoed this as she told of her concerns for her family in Kashmir, Pakistan, where

"All the bombs are going off and you never know... does it hit home? That is where we are living, where my uncle lives. You know, there are always bombs going off, was he OK? There is always worry but then it makes you realise how lucky you are to be here ... because there are a lot more opportunities here, especially for women."

Relationships with Boys

The theme of trust of daughters by parents was continued as the girls discussed their relationships with boys. One source of stress arose from how parents, and fathers in particular, felt about their daughter having friendships with boys, whether the relationships were intimate or the boys merely acquaintances.

Sharina's experience seemed typical of many:

"The thing is I went to a girls' school. The next thing I know... you go to college... I knew my dad was sort of 'iffed' about it. I was even scared of saying I made mates with a guy or something; he's going to jump on it. He saw a girl from my other school with a guy in a shopping centre and he said, 'Oh look, her parents are so nice and she is with a guy'. It's so horrible. They don't trust you. They think every guy you go to, you are going to have sex with him. They say, 'Oh we do trust you we just don't trust the boys'. It's ridiculous."

The difficulties seemed to be around trying to maintain friendships with boys in the face of their parent's worries. Shazia's mother was reported to have said that all boys are "a bit twisted" and they "always have other intentions in mind" not friendship. Iysha, who said her parents told her, "Be careful, no guys are after friendship, you know what he wants", echoed this. Shahida explained that, until she went to secondary school, her Dad was 'really cool' about boys. It seemed that after puberty things changed. Shahida described how she was expected to discontinue a friendship that she had had with a boy in her primary school, since he was "automatically seen as my boyfriend." She continued,

"You know that you (her father) had seen them before, you never said anything before. It was really hard for me to cope. I had all this freedom then it was all taken away."

It was apparent that the young women who experienced extreme anxiety about boys did so because of what they saw as unjustified parental restrictions upon their friendships. One highly stressed girl described her secret relationship with a white boy. She described their lives as "like two different worlds... when we are away from each other we can't relate to each other very well". The girls felt that, if the boys they socialised with were not of Asian origin, there would be even more arguments with their parents. Some of the girls said that their parents expected them to cover themselves to ensure that "you are not desirable to men". Shareen maintained that the scarf was seen as "a sort of barrier between you and

a man” but she thought that men “should control themselves”. Shareen went on to say,

“You shouldn’t wear high heels, no makeup, no hair dye... you should always be hidden.”

For other girls, the pull between wanting to retain their friends who were boys and the wish to please their parents meant that they saw no other option than to lie. Fazia said that she sometimes changed the name to a girl’s, even though her friend was a boy. Fazia went on to say that she knew her father would always allow her to go out. She was most worried about his opinion of her if he knew she was socialising with boys.

The young women with low to moderate levels of stress seemed to be able to continue friendships with boys by ensuring that their parents knew where they were and that their behaviour was beyond reproach. Once again, where the girls felt their parents trusted them, they respected that trust by staying within the prescribed boundaries of acceptable behaviour in their friendships with boys. These young women tended to socialise with boys in college but were discreet if they met them in public. For others, this was not enough and tensions arose if they felt they had to ‘blank’ friends if they met them outside college. Syma summed up the feelings of many girls when she said, “It’s friendship and that’s all that counts”.

Views on Marriage

The issue of marriage arose in all interviews. When the girls talked about their parents’ views and their own views on marriage, there was high emotion, laughter and, in some cases, tears. It became increasingly clear that the lives of the Asian young women were inextricably connected to marriage plans.

Where girls experienced little anxiety about their futures, they saw their parents as always “thinking of your best” and allowing the girls some degree of choice and control in decisions about marriage. Farah put it,

"I wouldn't want people to think that Asian parents aren't understanding. Maybe they see life in a different way. Your parents think of your best... In a way I'm really glad that my parents know it's my choice."

Young women with apparently low levels of stress trusted their parents to select boys that they thought would treat their daughters well, leaving the final decision to the girl. Harmeet told of her parents' marriage, explaining that they had a 'love marriage', where they chose each other. Harmeet went on to explain,

"My parents say, 'Because we had a love marriage'... they are both from completely different cultures in India... 'If our children fell in love we'd be OK... as long as they are Muslim and Asian'."

Harmeet went on to describe how her father often teases her when he meets her male friends, saying to her, "You don't fancy him do you?" Harmeet's relationship with her father seemed relaxed and open, with little or no sign of tension.

Many girls recognized that their family expect them to keep within acceptable 'cultural boundaries'. That is, their choices should be from within the Muslim, Asian community. Where girls felt they were able to choose their future husbands, they were pleased and relieved that their parents could introduce them to boys from known, 'good' families.

There also seemed to be less evidence of stress where young women decided to be assertive in expressing their views about marriage to their parents. Miram disclosed that, since her sisters did not have arranged marriages, even though "it caused problems", she was determined to choose her own husband. Miram said that she knew her parents were depending on her to have an arranged marriage but

"They know that I am going to rebel against it...so there is no point in trying... I would never agree to it. I have a right to choose whoever I want and if my parents don't like that, then they know where they can go. It's my choice."

There could, of course, be tensions in Miram's family when she comes to the point of expressing such views.

The source of anxiety for many girls stemmed from fears that they would have little control over the arranged marriage process. The experience most feared was to be forced to marry a previously unknown man and to be expected to live with him and his family in their country of origin. The young women spoke of knowing the 'signs'. Rhujida put it,

"It's like when you turn 17 or 18, they (other family and community members) say, 'Aint she married yet?' And if you do go abroad you know you are going to get married, you are not going for a holiday."

Shabina responded,

"Oh my god, those are the signs. I think all Asian girls know this. If they ask you your age, if they start asking if you can cook and ask about your education, then you know they are going to ask you (about marriage)."

Fazia seemed clear about what mothers want for their sons: "Someone who is really fair, who is really pretty, who works hard". She went on to say that many mothers openly asked girls about their homemaking skills, 'checking them out' as prospective daughter-in-laws.

Some girls expressed an understanding of their parents' responsibilities for ensuring their future happiness. They saw it as a 'big burden' for their parents and did not wish to add to it, although they did want to make their feelings known. Some girls were happy to carry the family *izzat*, or honour, and as Sharina expressed, "the key point in your life is your wedding day". In Farah's case, she was anxious because two of her older sisters had chosen their own partners. Farah felt that her parents were depending on her to have an arranged marriage in order to 'save face' in the community. There was also concern that if there were ever any difficulties in a relationship, the girl would be to blame for entering a 'love marriage'. Other girls talked about the importance of marrying relatively young, for example, before the age of 25, to ensure that the extended family did not view them as failures or as having been 'left on the shelf'. Where there were older sisters in the family, the girls saw themselves as 'having extra time' since the oldest daughters should be married first.

Aysha described the arranged marriage process:

"They won't force you, arranged marriages can happen in different ways. Mum and Dad can ask you, 'Do you want to marry this person?' Then

you get to know them. Get engaged, then get married. Some people just get married (without getting to know them)."

Shahida said that if you refuse a person, "They (the parent) will respect your wishes but they may not like your decision". It seemed that, once again, where parents and daughters shared mutual respect for each other, there was less likely to be high levels of stress. Even where girls had not met the prospective husband, many were willing to 'give it a chance' or, as Rehana put it,

"I will give them a look. They (parents) will have to accept that if I don't like them I am not going to agree to it. I don't want to rebel my family... that's the worst bit. I like my family, I love my parents... I don't want to fight with them over this whole marriage business."

The issue of marriage involves the extended family since, for some girls, male cousins or close family friends may come to the UK in the hope that they might meet their future wife. Some young women felt resentful that they were 'being used' as a way of ensuring that the young man could stay and work in the UK. Fozia showed some sympathy for boys coming from their home country since: "They would have to learn the language and get used to life here". Shareen said that the extended family "love doing it", that is, arranging marriages with relatives, and that "They assume they will be all right... they are relatives". Some girls felt under pressure to agree to inter-family marriage so as not to displease the extended family or let their parents down. Sayka described how her uncles and cousins in Pakistan had recently told her father, "She's old enough now... go get her married". Thus, it seems that the entire family may feel some pressure to ensure that a respectable marriage is arranged for Sayka.

A further source of potential stress came from the cultural tradition of the girl leaving her family to live with her husband's parents. For Aysha, her potential husband was said to have a "good mother" who "won't give you grief", since she only had "one other daughter, not ten, so less grief". However, the worry for Aysha was that she might be forced to give up her career if her husband's mother asked her to do so. Aysha explained:

"Even though you have achieved it (academic success) ... when you get married, it is up to the husband and the husband's mother as well. If she says you are not going to work, then you respect that and don't work..."

but then you think, 'Why did I do all this for?' It's an achievement but for what?"

The career versus marriage dilemma arose in many discussions. For some, marriage was viewed as the barrier to following a career, and many girls realised that they would be 'married off' after completing their college courses. For others, a career was viewed as a way to avoid marriage. Syma felt that if she did well at college her parents might 'change their minds' and allow her to pursue her chosen career rather than get married. Rayla was hoping to get a good job, live independently from her family and support herself. Shamila described how education might 'get you out of the marriage market':

"My Aunt's son had a girlfriend and the thing was she couldn't get married because she was educated and said, 'I can't stay home and cook for you all day. I can't go shopping for you; I have to work'. So now my Aunt is looking for someone who is uneducated, who won't work and who will stay at home and look after her. That is what they expect you to do... not live your life."

The extended family and the family of any future husband were generally perceived in one of two ways: as either being supportive and beneficial or as restricting choices and personal freedom. Of those girls who were eager to be married, some viewed their college education as offering something extra to potential husbands. These girls were very clear that there was more to be gained in joining a respected and caring family, than in following a career. Miram's view was that having a mother-in-law to "take care of you for the rest of your life", was an advantage.

Girls with high levels of stress saw themselves as having to 'work their way out of marriage'. Some felt under enormous pressure to achieve good grades in order to pursue high status careers, for example, medicine, pharmacy or law. If they failed to achieve university entrance, the only alternative, in their view, would be to enter an arranged marriage. As Parul put it,

"My Mum says if you fail then you are going to get married."

The most feared outcome, and potentially the greatest source of stress for the girls, arose from the worry that if they were sent back to the country of origin, they would never be able to return to the UK. Sefura put it,

“If they find someone for us in Bangladesh, then you are finished if you go over there. I think it is black magic or something. They come and like put a spell on you to get married... well I mean I’m not going... I mean I love going over there because it is so different... but it puts me off. I have known people who it happened to (sent to Bangladesh to get married), they didn’t come back.”

The fear of being trapped was clearly at the forefront of many of the girls’ thoughts about marriage, being unable to ‘live your own life’. High levels of stress seemed to arise from situations where the young women felt they had no control over their futures; where they felt they could not voice their wishes and opinions; and where they felt that their needs were not part of the equation.

Academic Achievement and Careers

Young women who did not seem anxious about their future careers felt supported and encouraged by their parents, without feeling pressured. On several occasions, mothers were spoken of as being particularly understanding and helpful in enabling their daughters to succeed, especially where they themselves had not been academically successful. Taslim said that her mother expected her to make the most of the ‘good opportunities’ in London, and did not expect her to be a ‘certain person’ at home. Taslim felt that she did not need to conform to stereotypical images of the Asian young woman, carrying out household duties at the expense of her studies, and that her parents just wanted her ‘to do good’ at college. Prabeya echoed these thoughts, and said,

“My Mum was quite happy that I have got a job (part-time) because I will be earning my own money... she wants us to go on educating ourselves in many different ways.”

Shahida told of her mother’s difficult experiences in that she married at 16 and had ‘been through a lot’. Shahida went on,

“She wants me to study and get an education so that my life is better.”

The greatest source of anxiety seemed to stem from perceived pressure to excel. Many girls felt that their parents had unrealistic expectations of their academic

abilities and career prospects. Shazia was working towards being a PE teacher, but said that her mother was 'cheesed off' because it was not a 'real career', such as law or medicine. Several girls were expected to get good jobs in high status professions; for example, Shuhana said that, according to her dad, she was going to get three 'A's and be a chartered accountant. Dipal was sympathetic to Shuhana's situation and added,

"Ever since I was a little girl, there was the nursing set. He (father) goes, 'She is going to be a doctor! Until the end I thought, 'Yeah, I can be a doctor'. But then I went to college reviews and they said you have to get 'A's from the start; and I thought, 'that is impossible. Oh my god!' "

Rehana related her story:

" I know a girl who got the second highest grades in the country. I didn't tell my parents for weeks. I was crying because I thought I had failed. My mum, she goes, 'Don't worry, if you have failed you just retake... you can do it again can't you?' My dad, he completely changes, he goes, 'What grades do you need to get?' (To be a doctor). I said, 'Five 'A's; so he goes, 'Do you think you could?' I said, 'Yeah, Yeah'. I got a 'D' and that was like ... (sings theme from *Jaws*). After a while they said, 'you should try and push up your grades. You should get 'B's.' "

Many young women clearly did not want to let their families down and were determined to work as hard as they could, yet many were realistic about what they would be able to achieve and knew that they could not reach the goals set for them by their parents. Matters were made worse if an older sibling had been academically successful, since younger children would be expected to achieve similar results. Where older siblings had failed, the girls spoke of having to redeem the family honour. In Fatimah's case, rather than comply with her parents' wishes and enter university, she wanted to move to Pakistan and live there, with other family members.

In many cases, it seemed that the girls did not express their fears and worries, nor did they talk to their parents about their own academic ability and aspirations for the future, serving merely to heighten the level of stress experienced.

The views of the wider Asian community are held in high regard by families, and many young women felt under great pressure to 'be really clever' and 'do better' than cousins or friends. Aysha put it,

"We have a lot of guests and relatives so it is important what they think. No-one gives a crap about studying but as soon as our GCSE results come out everyone accidentally rings round my house... this is very annoying because when you are looking for support it is not there and when you come out passing, everyone goes, 'My daughter got one 'A''. They were not exactly supportive at the time."

Rehana described the intense academic competition that she was aware of in the community, where 'everyone is jealous of everyone'. She went on to explain how she responds and said,

"Because you've got a community, it puts pressure on kids... you start comparing kids' results ... comparing with another person you have never met... and you think, 'I can beat that person'."

Thus, Rehana puts pressure on herself to gain higher academic success than her peers.

It seems that the extended family community plays a crucial part in preventing, or increasing, anxiety and stress for the Asian young women at Piper College. Where girls feel that their parents are proud of them, no matter what their academic performance is, and where parents ensure that their daughters do not feel under pressure to out-perform peers in the community, the young women experience less stress. However, most young women were anxious to bring honour to the family through their academic achievements. The importance of the view of the community is a theme that is explored further in the next section.

The Community

The Asian Community Response to Asian Girls

Most girls interviewed at Piper College felt a responsibility to maintain the family honour or *izzat* in the eyes of the local and extended Asian community. Where young women saw themselves as representing their families in a positive and respectable manner, there was little evidence of anxiety in relation to the community. However, many girls were keenly aware of clear guidelines that should be followed, and indicated that they knew community members watched their behaviour. For some, this was seen as an immense burden and source of stress.

Rahina was aware of the responsibility to maintain a positive image and commented:

“My mum worries sometimes and says, ‘Someone was telling me this girl (another Asian girl) was doing something. Make sure you don’t go with her... people talk’. I think because we have been brought up with it we know that there are people like that out there; you just have to accept it. There is always a bad side to something good and we have to be more careful I think... being Asian girls... we have to be a bit more careful generally.”

The issue of being careful when choosing friends arose several times. This caused tension and worry for many girls in that they were frightened about being labelled ‘bad’ by association. Aysha’s friend had been seen talking to boys, with the result that she was ‘automatically in trouble as well’.

By far the most discussed topic, in terms of community response, was ‘gossip’. The girls worried not only about being watched but also about observers telling their family and spreading rumours about their behaviour. As well as how they were seen to behave with boys, another outward sign of respectability was clothes. Some young women felt they were expected to wear traditional dress, for example, a shalwar kameez, and commented that they knew there was gossip if they wore Western clothes. Many girls saw older Asian women as fuelling rumours. Fazia felt that

“The Asians have got this thing. Asian women have got nothing better to do with their lives... except talking about other people’s lives. They don’t look at their own family; they attack someone else’s and that ruins them.”

Shareen said that she had to ‘watch every step’ whenever she went out, as they (other Asian women) would go and ask her mother, “Should you be letting your daughter be doing this?” The girls experienced anxiety and stress if they felt they were being gossiped about. Many girls were indignant if their friends were attacked and the process of ‘standing up for them’ became stressful in itself.

Farah described an argument with her mother as she tried to protect her friend.

Farah told her mother,

“Look at her... you don’t even know her.... It (rumours) has ruined her life.”

Fatimah showed some sympathy for the mothers in the Asian community and related a story where an Asian male had ‘reported’ her female friend for talking to a boy. Fatimah went on to say how her friend’s mother was unable to defend her daughter ‘because of respect’. Rehana continued the discussion about the position of women when she said that she knew her own mother would be ‘too scared’ to say, “Oh no, she (Rehana) wouldn’t do that, she isn’t capable of it”.

The situation was made worse if a male came to the family to tell of misdemeanours by the daughter since, in the girls’ view, women had to concede to men. Further stress arose from situations where girls had to defend their behaviour to their parents after ‘Asian ladies’ had ‘spread gossip’. As Rehana put it, “It’s them against us, what can I say?”

Satbinder told her story:

“Well, for me it (gossip and rumours) is a new thing. I never actually experienced it until my dad died. It was like they had never gone, ‘How is she dressing? Who is she going out with? Where is she going?’ Then (after his death) they literally wanted to know everything about me. Before ... well I did whatever I liked.”

The community took on the protective male role after the death of her father and Satbinder found this to be invasive and difficult. Shara picked up this theme when she said that

“Because we haven’t got a father...you know the kids are doing whatever they like... and they are blaming the mother for it... they shouldn’t really.”

Satbinder and Shara felt extra pressure to conform since their mothers would be held responsible for any of their daughters’ misdemeanours.

Many young women saw the Asian community as watching them closely and some spoke of ‘surveillance’ and ‘watching’ almost in the terms of a Foucauldian panopticon. Many girls felt watched by those who lived several miles away but who were in ‘the Muslim community’. Others did not feel pressure from the community even though, as Sadia put it, “They might start gossiping”. Sadia went on,

“It is just one of those things. I don’t think it is a huge problem... I know my relatives know me.”

Taslim echoed these thoughts and said that her parents had brought her up not to listen to ‘any of that’. Once again, it seemed that where parents trusted their daughters, community gossip was not an issue and the girls had few concerns.

Several Asian girls expressed the view that, in attending college or university, they were inviting further criticisms from the Asian community or extended family. Girls felt that they were under considerable pressure to prove that, even if others ‘smoke and do drugs’ at college, they would not. Fozia explained,

“It is the way that they don’t actually see how the person is in general...like they (parents in the Asian community) have this picturized image... they say, ‘There is a college girl’... they have an image that you are all the same.”

Sadia said that her father had wanted her to attend college but her aunts had told him it was a ‘really bad place because there were boys there’. Fozia remarked, laughing, that her relatives viewed college ‘like a disco or something’. Aysha appeared to be highly anxious in that she did not want to let her parents down, in the eyes of ‘guests and relatives’, by attending university. She went on,

“Well people might say you are not a good parent. How can you let your daughter go to university? You don’t know what she is going to do.”

Some girls, with moderate to high levels of stress, viewed older community members as being biased against colleges and universities and as having deep

misgivings about their girls attending. For many Asian parents further and higher education, in a Western culture, is outside the realm of their own experience. Several girls expressed an understanding of their parents' position. The girls did not wish to diminish family standing in the community yet did not want to forego their education.

Many girls went to great lengths to stay within set limits, but the greatest source of stress stemmed from situations where the girls saw themselves as stepping outside acceptable boundaries. In these cases they had to shoulder guilt, knowing that the community saw them as letting their families down, and felt the need to acknowledge that they were 'in the wrong'. Shara spoke of her difficult situation when she disclosed that

"Being an Asian girl... they look at me... like coming home at 9 o'clock. I am the only Asian girl in the street coming home at 9 o'clock... and to walk with my white boyfriend in the street... this is totally wrong."

Not only did Shara feel the stress of failing her family and community but she also felt that she was failing herself in some way... she was 'totally wrong'. The result was loneliness and isolation, since she had few friends in the Asian community.

The Western Community Response to Asian Girls

Several young women discussed the stereotypical view that some Westerners have of Asian girls. Shahina felt that even though many of her family members are 'clever', their Asian academic and vocational qualifications 'don't mean a lot' in the UK. Shahina added,

"My family... they come here and are working but people put them down and say, 'Oh, typical restaurant worker' and they have really low status."

Rehana and Sofia spoke about their awareness of the lack of understanding that many non-Asians have about Asian girls. Rehana explained,

"I think a lot of people make it a huge deal about Asian girls... about them having huge problems or something. I just think that every parent

wants their kids to do well and they just have different ways of showing it.”

Sofia thought that non-Asians ‘put a little label’ on Asian girls that proclaims, ‘Oh my god, she is Asian, she is so sad!’. Sofia went on to describe her close friendship with a non-Asian girl. She said,

“She doesn’t understand. She is always saying, ‘can’t you do this? What is happening?’ I say, ‘You know I have to do this’. I talk to her and it is all right... she listens. Sometimes she does criticize... but then people are going to do that.”

There seemed to be a sense of the inevitability of criticism stemming from the Western media and society. Sofia and Rehana clearly had to deal with a lack of understanding about their position and role as Asian women, which resulted in them having to make every effort to present a positive image to their non-Asian peers. Although this was not perceived as being particularly stressful, it did necessitate them having to cope with extra issues.

At College

Work Load, Examinations and Expectations

When asked about what they find to be stressful in college, almost all of the young women spoke about the ‘work load’ and pressure of examinations. Many girls said they found ‘subject pile up’ to cause the most worry. Aysha described how all teachers ‘seem to give course work at the same time’ and then ‘everything comes into collision’. Rajeda commented that she thought college staff do not liaise or consult with each other about when to give assignments, resulting in periods where there are few tasks and times when students are suddenly inundated with work.

Sadia said that finding the time for the family as well as large amounts of college work was particularly stressful. That is, trying to maintain a balance

between home and college. Taslim spoke of trying to keep a part-time job going at the same time as attending college. This was a theme picked up by Shara who told of having to miss some lectures in order to keep her job at a local shop. Shara voiced her worries about 'being chucked out of college' if she did not attend regularly.

One theme arising out of the girls' comments about college seemed to be about 'trying to keep a balance' and 'stay in control'. Sadia spoke about the issue of 'control' when she said,

"I think from school to college there is a big leap. At school we took our time with everything but in college everything is rushing... the main problem is trying to keep control of everything."

Razia added that, in college, students are 'expected to be responsible for their own work' and keep ahead of tasks. Aysha also focused upon the differences between school and college. She said,

"It's the shock of like coming here and finding it all out; it's so new and different... it's hard ... that's what you realise."

Several girls implied that secondary school had been more supportive and that, at Piper College, they were expected to 'take control' on their own.

Relationships

Where the girls spoke about difficult relationships in college, in the main they focused upon their peers. However, Amina said that she felt that 'quite a few teachers' created a 'really competitive atmosphere' in college, and that trying to be 'better than other students' placed a great strain on her. Many other young women held lively discussions about the stress and anxiety that stemmed from the relationships with, and behaviour of, other students.

Farah talked about 'bullying', 'problems' and 'arguments' with both girls and boys in college. She went on,

“Bullying can be physical or mental... like they say, ‘You can’t do this’.”

The experience of being ‘mentally bullied’ in college, was described by Shuhana:

“I don’t really worry about home life. Any stress in my life is caused by certain people (in college). If you do something word gets round quickly... and if you don’t do something word gets round. Sometimes it can get to you. You can be walking down the corridor and someone will look at you and you think, ‘what are you looking at me like that for?’ You think, ‘I don’t really want to be here’. Everyone knows each other here... they know your appearance and attitude ... everyone knows everyone else’s family.”

A few days prior to this, graffiti about Shuhana had been daubed on the walls in the girls’ toilets. She was feeling particularly distressed at this time.

The greatest source of stress seemed to arise if girls thought they were being ‘watched’ (somewhat like Foucault’s notion of surveillance) by other students from the Asian community. Many felt they were under enormous pressure to conform to acceptable standards of behaviour. This included being appropriately dressed as well as not being seen to ‘flirt with boys’. Harmeet described the experience as a ‘spotlight’ and went on to say that ‘they are watching you all the time’ for any misdemeanours and that ‘it just all builds up’.

Several young women spoke of being aware that they are constantly watched, the greatest concern being if their behaviour was misinterpreted or misunderstood and wrongly reported back to community members and parents. Sadia put it,

“It’s not them knowing... I don’t care what they think... but in a way I do care. It’s the way they change things and twist things.”

It seemed that, if girls had arguments with their peers in college, their greatest concern would be if reprisal came in the form of unfair gossip within the community.

Where girls felt their behaviour was appropriate and suitably modest, and where they had strong, supportive friendship groups, there seemed to be few concerns about peer relationships within college, and low levels of apparent stress.

However, where Asian girls’ behaviour was deemed, by other Asian students, to

be more 'Westernised' than was appropriate, and where they had few friends to 'speak up for them', the fear of gossip caused significant anxiety and high levels of stress. The stress experienced seemed to be more intense where the young women felt they had no recourse.

Signs and Symptoms of Stress

Introduction

One of the aims of the research was to ascertain the degree to which staff at Piper College were aware of the unique position of Asian girls. The hypothesis being that, unless the young women had a *statement*, or officially recognised special educational needs, their needs would remain 'invisible'. To this end, it was important to gain information about how the girls displayed signs and symptoms of stress at home and in college, and whether their coping strategies masked underlying difficulties.

At Home

Most of the girls interviewed said that, if they were worried or upset, they would usually become quieter at home. Nadia's view represented the majority of girls when she said that it would very much depend upon the nature of the problem. If the concern was work or college-related then she might discuss it with her parents; otherwise, if it were more of a 'personal problem', she would 'just go quiet around the house'. Prabeya said she would stay in her room more. Iyeman said that she would stay by herself in her room because she would not want to worry her parents but that they would realise she was 'not around'. Many girls told of how they would isolate themselves, 'hide' and 'keep things inside'. Fatimah described how she 'bunked school' for 3 months when she had 'personal problems', telling of how she 'would go down the park' and that 'nobody knew'.

The girls were unanimous when they spoke about possible symptoms of their stress at home: they would stay silent and no one would know. It seemed that, in the unlikely event that someone at home noticed they were anxious, it would be their mothers or older sisters who might comment on 'moodiness' or 'quietness'. It was very clear from the interview responses that the Asian young women did not reveal their anxieties or worries at home unless there were concerns directly related to college work.

At College

The girls' descriptions of their behaviour at college, when under stress, were very similar to how they spoke about their behaviour at home. Once again, the almost unanimous response to stress in the college setting was one of withdrawal and silence: Shuhana said she would be 'quieter and tired'. Sefura described how, although she usually 'yaps', when under pressure she becomes 'grumpy' and 'stops yapping'. Amina said that she goes quiet, cries, and stops talking and tends 'to just sit and daydream'. Faiza put it,

"I know that girls are very good at blocking things out, but people in college would not have one clue about what is going on at home unless you tell them. It is hard for people to realise what ... that something is bothering you."

Nearly all the young women said that they always talk to their friends (other girls) about personal problems. This will be explored further in chapter eight, but it is helpful to highlight the marked contrast between the open communication the girls enjoyed with their Asian female friends and the total absence of communication with college staff about personal problems. The young women spoke of how they would 'never hide things' with friends since other girls would already know that 'something was wrong' as they can 'generally tell'. Aysha thought that teachers would not know if there were difficulties 'because they don't know anything about you'. Shaheda explained that as they had only been attending college for a few months it would be 'too early for them (teachers) to actually tell' if something was wrong, whereas if someone had 'known you all

your life' then 'if you were quiet they would know something was wrong'. Although some young women said they might appear to be 'moody' in college, teachers would not question them about it. It seemed that the only signs of stress that might be noticed by college staff would be if grades dropped or if they were not 'as bothered' or not 'paying attention'. However, Nadia reflected that she did not think teachers would notice these signs. The picture seemed to be further complicated in that two of the girls spoke about how they would 'cover their tracks'. Aysha put it,

"Sometimes I look at the teachers like I am listening ... but I am not."

Shahida said that she pays attention in class and takes notes but that if she was stressed or if her grades were low, teachers should ask her about it. However, she added,

"But when they ask (about problems) ... I might completely lie".

It seemed that the young women not only remained silent in college about personal difficulties but also made a conscious effort to ensure that staff did not find out, even if teachers asked the girls directly about their worries. Shahida made an exception and explained that one female teacher would be 'able to pick up on things'. Fatima spoke about the presumptions that are made if a girl is seen to be 'quiet'. She explained,

"Nobody knows you here properly and if you are quiet they assume that you have a quiet personality so its kind of alright... you can hide what you've got."

It may be that Fatima was alluding to the stereotypical view of Asian girls as 'quiet' and unassuming. Indeed, Noreen felt that she is 'already very quiet'. She continued,

"They (teachers) say, you have got to ask more questions... but I don't want to."

So it seems that where teachers encourage the girls to 'speak up' and 'ask questions', it may result in the young women feeling uncomfortable and threatened, and even less likely to discuss their worries and concerns.

Asian Young Women with Identified Special Educational Needs: Experiences and Expressions of Stress

Introduction

In order to explore the notion of 'invisibility' further, a group of Asian young women who were being formally supported by the college system were interviewed. These girls' special educational needs had been formally identified and a *statement of need* issued. This data raises the question as to whether stress is alleviated where there is visibility of identified need. One group interview was held with four young women present; two were following GNVQ vocational courses and two were taking A-Level subjects.

At Home and in the Asian Community

The girls' comments about experiences of stress in their home and community did not, in the main, stand out as being any different to the remarks made by the Asian girls without formally recognised needs. However, the girls in the *SEN* group did tend to focus the discussion upon the issue of independence. Shaheeda commented that, whereas normally parents would not want a girl to attend college, she felt that they are now 'allowing more independence'. Farah said that she wanted a job and did not want to depend on her parents. Delara felt her parents were 'very protective', commenting,

"They treat me like I am really young... because they worry about me. When I went to school they wouldn't let me go alone."

Delara clearly had mixed feelings about being 'protected', going on to say,

"Because I have been really ill and everything I am really close to my mum. The others are healthy; they do their own thing. I have been the one with the problems. I have always been my mum's favourite because of that... and the others say, 'Why do you always favour her?' It can cause a little bit of trouble because I get what I want and they don't. I am the second oldest but mum treats me like the youngest. I don't do no housework... nothing. The two younger ones, they cook... everything... they do everything and I don't."

When the discussion turned to plans for the future, Delara said that she would like to stay at home to be 'secure and everything'. There was a lively debate in the group. Shaheeda and Farah said they were determined to leave home, whilst Delara and Noreen stated that they intended to stay with their parents. Noreen's father wanted her to 'stay at home', whilst Shaheeda's mother wanted her to 'go on educating herself'. Delara and Noreen felt relieved and safe in the knowledge that they would be 'looked after'; although there seemed to be some conflicting thoughts about not wishing to be treated like a child.

One other issue that Delara raised in the group concerned the difficulties she had in completing college work at home. Delara explained that, even when she did not have lessons to attend, she remained in college in order to receive help with her work. She said,

"I won't get help at home. I know my family try to help me as much as possible but one is doing A-levels and one is doing psychology at university... so they have got their own stress... so there is no one to really help me and I can't really be selfish and ask them to help me... so at home I don't do no work."

In order to complete her *GNVQ* assignments, Delara felt she should stay in college as much as possible. Although, in other interviews, young women had spoken of family pressures competing with college work, Delara was the only girl to say she felt unable to complete college work at home.

At College

The young women in the *SEN* group commented that, when in college, their main sources of stress came from heavy workloads and assignment 'pileup'. These comments were comparable to those of the other Asian girls interviewed. However, several girls in the *SEN* group mentioned factors directly relating to their specific difficulties that caused added anxiety.

Shaheeda, who has visual difficulties, told of her worries about losing her sight. She had missed lengthy periods of the college term whilst in hospital for operations on her eyes and explained,

“When I got back I was stressed out anyway trying to catch up on all this work. But I did it! I did it!”

Delara spoke of her reading difficulties, saying that what might take another student one hour would take her three or four hours. She said,

“I can’t read myself... I can read but I can’t read properly... it doesn’t make sense to me and I am really slow.... Then I make myself ill. I do try my best but sometimes teachers don’t understand that you are slower.”

Delara told of how her lap-top had broken down, how she had fallen behind with work, stopped going to lessons because she was scared of teachers ‘hassling’ her and decided to ‘quit’. Farah was anxious about a future university place, going on to say that she felt some universities had rejected her because of her hearing difficulties.

Each member of the group experienced stress and tension that was specifically related to their particular difficulty. However, it quickly became apparent that this particular group of girls felt that they had a readily available source of help in Ann, the learning support teacher. Ann’s support seemed to make the difference between seemingly impossible situations and feeling able to cope. The enormously positive influence that Ann had on each of their lives will be explored further in the section on *Coping Strategies*. Nonetheless, it is important to note that, in the college context, perceived levels of stress in the *SEN* group seemed markedly lower than the apparent levels of stress experienced by Asian girls without ‘officially identified’ special needs.

Signs and Symptoms of Stress

The *SEN* group of young women did not specifically mention whether family members would recognize if they were anxious or stressed. However, parents and siblings were clearly aware of the girls' special educational needs. In college, all the girls said that they would tell Ann (the support teacher) about their worries, especially if work-related. Delara said that she would often 'end up crying' in college and would feel 'hassled' by other teachers but that Ann would be able to recognize any signs of stress and anxiety.

Non-Asian Young Women's Experiences and Expressions of Stress

Introduction

14 non-Asian girls were interviewed in four groups using the same methods. The intention was to check for similarities and differences in experiences of perceived stress between the Asian and non-Asian girls. The non-Asian girls' ethnic backgrounds were diverse and included those whose parents were born in: UK (8), Greece (1), Jamaica (1), Nigeria (1), Spain (1), Ghana (1) and Portugal (1). As with the Asian girls' groups, some girls were following vocational (*GNVQ*) courses whilst others were taking A-level subjects.

At Home and in the Local Community

The young women in the non-Asian (*NA*) group did not specifically refer to stress connected with their role as a daughter in the family, nor did they mention any specific duties that they were expected to carry out. However, three of the

girls spoke about their concerns for older family members who were ill. Tamika spoke of her 'real responsibility' in looking after her mother who has multiple sclerosis; Caryn was worried about her mother, who was awaiting health test results; and Martha was concerned about her nan. Several girls said they would be unlikely to discuss their concerns with their fathers and two others spoke of turbulent relationships with brothers. The greatest source of stress for *NA* girls seemed to stem from their anxieties about their parents' relationships. Angela spoke about the arguments that her mother and father had and her inability to stop them. Sarah felt that her parents were highly stressed themselves because they 'have so many things, they get uptight' and 'they have enough work to do' because of the large number of children in the family. Sarah felt under pressure not to add to the strain.

None of the young women in the *NA* group spoke about their parents' views on marriage nor did they voice their own thoughts about future partners. However, several *NA* girls felt their parents wanted them to do their 'best' and that they 'put pressure on' to succeed. Lyn said,

"I think they think I don't work hard enough and they think if they pressure me more I'd get better grades. I end up having arguments with them... they think they know what's best... they probably do (*laughter*)."

Vicky told of how her family expected her to take on the family pharmacy business and that she felt the greatest stress came from the 'pressure to think on your own and cope'. She added, "they expect a lot".

The theme of independent living arose as a major source of stress for many girls in the *NA* group. Sonia summed up her feelings:

"Well, it's stressful basically supporting myself. The family don't pay for anything that I do. I don't really see them. Home is just a place where I live. Where you fall asleep really... isn't it? I have got a brother but he is always at work... just occasionally bumping into my mum... more a case of stress of having to sort things out for myself... like making sure I have got money for things I want to do... going out with friends or buying clothes or getting letters into my doctor on time... that's a stress."

These discussions were in marked contrast to the Asian young women who spoke at length about their lives in terms of their roles within their families, rather than the pressures upon them to be independent.

When analysing the *NA* group interviews it was clear that the nub of discussions revolved around very different issues than for the Asian girls' groups. The topics of marriage and careers, that had been central to the conversations between the Asian young women, were all but missing in the *NA* groups. New themes emerged from the *NA* girls that had not been touched upon during the rest of the data collection. These young women's central concerns were about their desire for freedom in the face of the difficulties that came with growing independence from their parents. Sarah and Sasha told of the stress inherent in trying to fit in part-time work with college assignments, whilst Leah related the difficulties she had in trying to fit in leisure time when her parents expected her to be studying. Money worries came high on the agenda of many discussions. Most of the *NA* girls had part-time jobs, with the result being that they were expected to earn and manage their own money. Carla spoke about her own ill health that she felt was due to being exhausted from trying to work and attend college.

In striking contrast to the Asian girls' interviews, the non-Asian girls did not mention their local community or extended families. There was little mention of parental expectations in terms of future marriage or careers, although several girls felt their parents wanted them to succeed at college.

At College

Like the Asian young women, the non-Asian girls highlighted the 'heavy workloads' in college as being stressful. Lyn and Caryn mentioned 'deadlines' and 'getting work in on time', whilst Tamika was concerned about trying to fit in revision with completing assignments and her part-time job. Marsha said that

she became anxious when given work that she felt she could not complete without help.

The *NA* girls described stressful and tense relationships between students. Lara spoke about 'horrible fights' between 'big groups' of young men and women, whilst Sasha and Sarah felt that some 'personalities' were 'quite irritating'. The girls appeared to experience low to moderate anxiety as a result of difficult peer relationships. Teachers were not mentioned as causing stress, except by Carmen, who said,

"Well you either love them or hate them."

For the *NA* girls, college seemed to be a place that was relatively stress-free and where they could enjoy their independence.

Signs and Symptoms of Stress

When discussing whether or not other family members might know if they were stressed, the responses of the *NA* girls were in marked contrast to those of the Asian young women who had spoken of their silence and tendency to isolate themselves when under pressure. The *NA* girls spoke about the observable outward signs they would give when highly anxious. Carmen said that she would 'shout and scream a lot' at home, then 'go and collapse... then break down and cry'. Several girls felt that their mothers would 'know if something was wrong', Angela put it,

"My mum always knows ... anything from a broken finger nail ... she knows."

Malika thought that if she were quiet or 'really down', her mum would 'pick it up'. She went on:

"The energy around me ... they would know ... your tone of voice and energy... that is how they would pick it up."

Several *NA* girls commented that their fathers would be less likely to know if their daughters were stressed but Sarah added that her dad would ask her what

was wrong if she appeared to be moody. One young woman in the *NA* group stated that she would 'stay at home and talk' but that if she were angry she would try to stay silent in case she 'took it out on other people'.

If the *NA* young women felt anxious in college, they told of how they would be unlikely to reveal their concerns to college staff. Some *NA* girls thought that teachers would not know if their students were highly stressed, whilst others said that teachers would know if they were 'acting all different' and that 'they would know something is wrong' but they 'probably wouldn't say nothing to you'. Angela, Sasha and Alison all mentioned specific teachers who they thought would be perceptive enough to ask the girls if they were worried. Ann, the support teacher, was named, as were two other female subject teachers.

Case Study 'Vignettes'

The data presented thus far has used the girls' comments to illustrate and clarify themes that emerged during the interviews. However, the day-to-day life of girls experiencing low stress is very different to the lives of those enduring extreme anxiety and distress. The three 'vignettes' are intended to offer glimpses into the reality of the 'lived in' experience, and to highlight the contrasts between the lives of those coping with high stress, those who confront moderate stressors and those with relatively few difficulties.

Although the comments of all three girls, Amina, Sadia and Shahida, have been included in previous text, the vignettes will present their stories in a more cohesive form.

Case Study One: Amina's Story (High Stress)

Amina asked if she could be interviewed alone. She came to the session wearing Western clothes, looking pale and drawn, and was in tears for most of the time. With her permission, this is her story (all names have been changed):

Amina's father died when she was eight years old. She described him as being the most important person in her life who loved her. Her parents had married, in Bangladesh, when her mother was 14 years old. Eight children were born, with Amina being the youngest child. She described her siblings as bringing disappointment to her mother because they did not conform to traditional Muslim values and traditions. One unmarried sister was pregnant and an older brother was mentally ill, both siblings were living at home. Amina explained how her brother had had a drug problem, was meant to stay in secure accommodation but had ended up at home. He had also had a serious accident leaving him with injuries.

Amina felt that the community saw her family as 'bad' and that she was expected to redeem the family *izzat* or honour. She told of how she was expected to carry out all the household duties and be like other 'good' Asian girls by entering into an arranged marriage and staying at home. Amina went on to say that she thought she had been spoilt as a child until she had tried to be independent. Over time, arguments between Amina and her mother increased until Amina felt the situation to be intolerable. She left home and went to live with her sister-in-law but was unable to pay rent or support herself financially, and was scared to approach social services in case there were repercussions and her mother's benefits were withdrawn.

Amina got a job in a local shop, which resulted in her missing several college lessons. She was following three A-level courses and staff at Piper College had told Amina that she must attend regularly or her place would be terminated. Amina found herself to be very much alone. She had a white boyfriend, which was not acceptable by family standards, but found that she was unable to tell him of her difficulties and she did not want him to find out about her circumstances.

Amina spent her time with white girl friends, although they found it difficult to understand her situation. She told of how other Asian girls stayed away from her since she felt they were critical of her lifestyle. As a result, Amina described feeling utterly alone and wondered if she would ever be happy. Her dream was to have a stable relationship and have something to look forward to.

At the end of the interview session Amina took up my offer of counselling. I saw her for regular sessions during the following college year. She presented as very depressed and, in my professional opinion, at risk of self-harm.

Case Study Two: Sadia's Story (Moderate Stress)

Sadia came to the session with her close friend Refina. Both girls were following A-level courses. Sadia wore traditional clothing of shalwar kameez and scarf and Refina wore Western clothes. Sadia and Refina clearly had much in common; they listened attentively to each other and, in the main, cues were not needed to keep the discussion going.

Sadia's mother had lived most of her life in Pakistan before coming to the UK with her father. In recent years, Sadia's parents had divorced. Sadia felt that her father's family and the Asian community generally blamed her mother and the children for the split. Her two older brothers had not been academically successful at school and all hopes were pinned on Sadia to achieve success. She explained that her cousins had tried to persuade Sadia's mother to keep her at home in order to fulfil traditional female duties in carrying out household chores. However, although she was worried about what people in the family and community might say, Sadia's mother had encouraged her to attend college. Sadia felt that this was because her mother had not had the opportunity to gain an education and indeed was now unable to work.

Sadia clearly felt pressure to succeed where others had failed. She explained that in attending college she was automatically subjecting herself to the scrutiny of

family and community members, since, as Sadia explained, female college students were often associated with drugs, smoking and illicit relationships with boys. Sadia herself was openly critical of other Asian girls who did not maintain cultural and religious standards in college, and was keen to lead an exemplary life in college. Sadia did not want to let her mother down but clearly felt that she wanted to achieve something in her own right. Sadia thought that her mother would not be able to understand how difficult it was to span home and college life. She felt supported by her mother but was keenly aware that ultimately control came from her uncles in Pakistan and her male cousins. Decisions about her future, including marriage, were to be made by others, and Sadia voiced her concerns about not sharing in the decision-making process.

Case Study Three: Shahida's Story (Low Stress)

Shahida came to the interview with five friends. All of the girls were following A-level courses. Shahida wore a traditional black shalwar kameez as well as a hijab (veil) worn closely around the head and neck. The girls in the group were lively, positive and laughed a great deal during the session.

Shahida was born in the UK and described herself as being in the middle: between her own culture and religion and the UK society. Shahida said that it was impossible to compare home and college because the environments were so different but that she was always the same person, no matter where she was. She spoke of having to fit in with parents when at home and join in with friends at college. Shahida thought that she was very lucky to have been born in the UK, since she felt this had given her more freedom and opportunities for personal success. Crucially, she viewed her own success as a channel through which she could improve her family status.

Shahida spoke of the close relationship she enjoyed with her mother and added that her parents did not pressure her but wanted her to do well. Shahida went on to say that Asian girls are often seen as having very strict parents and huge

problems but she went to some length to explain that this was not always the case, commenting that parents merely want what is best for their children.

Shahida said that she recognized that, as an Asian girl, she had to be more careful and accept that there would always be gossip in the community. Shahida thought that there would always be a bad side to something that is good. She added that gossip did not cause her any significant concern since she felt that her relatives knew and trusted her. Shahida commented that her brother had recently become deeply religious and that this was having a good effect upon the entire family.

Much of the interview was spent in elated and laughter-filled conversation about the positive benefits of being part of an extended Asian family. Shahida spoke about the unique and special bond that Asian people have with each other and added that the bond can even be felt between Asians who had never met before. Her extended family includes relatives who are still in Kashmir and Shahida told of family worries when there is conflict and war in the region. She had visited Kashmir several times and spoke about the mountains, the peaceful atmosphere and the sense of excitement and togetherness at family weddings. Many of the girls in the group joined in with enthusiasm as Shahida described the festival of Eid: the entire family, which seemed to include the whole village, would arrive at her grandmother's house. The party would go on for days. When describing Ramadan, Shahida spoke about the feeling of togetherness at waking up in the morning to pray, and the sense of achievement in the evening when everyone gathered to feast. She seemed to have few concerns about her future, her plan being to get a job and marry at some stage. Shahida repeatedly talked about feeling at ease in her family and said that, as an Asian girl, she had been given something extra.

Amina, Sadia and Shahida's stories will be continued in Chapter 8, where the focus will be upon the contrasts between the girls' coping strategies at home and at Piper College.

The Perceived Stress Scale: Results

The Perceived Stress Scale (*PSS*), designed by Cohen, Kamarck and Mermelstein, 1983, measures 'the degree to which situations are appraised as stressful'. The 14 test items refer to subjective appraisals of events occurring over one month (Johnston, Wright and Weinman, 1995). The authors suggest that the *PSS* taps only one domain of distress and does not include a measure of diminished self-esteem or depression.

The *PSS* was given to all girls interviewed (54 Asian and 14 non-Asian) as well as a number of others. In total, 64 Asian girls and 48 non-Asian girls completed the scale. The increased numbers taking the standardised tests was as a result of my being asked to give lectures about my work as an educational psychologist, as well as talks about stress. As part of the sessions, the students were asked to complete the scale, providing not only a talking point for discussion but also additional sample numbers.

Perceived Stress Scale					
<u>Ethnic Group</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>St. Dev.</u>	<u>St. Error Mean</u>	<u>Score Range</u>
Asian Girls:	64	30.48	6.91	0.86	16 - 52
Non-Asian Girls:	48	28.94	5.78	0.83	17 - 39
Total:	112				
t-Test for Equality of Means: Sig. (2-tailed): .200 (Not significant)					
(Equal variances not assumed)					

Figure 7.2 Results of the Perceived Stress Scale

In order to test if the means of the two unrelated (Asian and non-Asian) samples differed, Asian and non-Asian, the independent samples *t-test* (2-tailed) was used and computed with the aid of the SPSS computer package (SPSS Inc. 1998).

Appendix 14 discusses the use of parametric tests, internal reliability and score distribution of the *PSS*.

Figure 7.2 indicates that there was no significant difference between the scores for Asian and non-Asian girls and both groups demonstrated high levels of perceived stress. The mean scores of both groups were some 10 points above the mean score (19.62) achieved when the authors piloted the test. Although the authors do not indicate a cut-off point, they suggest that higher scores indicate greater levels of perceived stress. Furthermore, there were no significant differences between the *PSS* scores of Asian young women from different ethnic backgrounds (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh).

Where a young woman's score on the *PSS* was high it did not necessarily mean that she gave accounts of high stress when interviewed. Prabia, whose score of 52 indicated that she was experiencing extreme anxiety, did not voice any particular concerns in her interview, although she had fully participated in discussion. Shahida, the subject of case study three ('low stress'), scored 32 (over 12 points above the mean score given by the test authors) yet she tells of apparent contentment at home and presents a positive attitude about her future. It may be that Shahida's coping strategies enabled her to cope well with high stress, resulting in an outward display of a happy and contented disposition.

Furthermore, it became apparent during the interviews that some girls were experiencing high levels of stress as they described their difficulties, yet when their *PSS* scores were compared to their comments there seemed to be little correlation. Amina, the subject of case study one ('high stress'), initially scored 37 on the *PSS* and, when interviewed, she described seemingly intolerable circumstances that brought her extreme anxiety and deep depression. Four months later, after reducing her college workload and receiving counselling, Amina's score dropped to 31. Sadia, the subject of case study two ('moderate stress') scored 29 on the *PSS*.

Although the high *PSS* scores of both Asian and non-Asian girls implied that they were all perceiving themselves to be highly stressed, the test results do not reveal the nature of that stress. It may be that the *PSS* was not an appropriate or

valid test to use with adolescent groups of mixed ethnicity in the UK, since the test sample used by Cohen et al. was from an adult population in the USA. In comparison, the qualitative data was able to reach beneath the surface and examine the 'lived-in' experiences of those with high levels of perceived stress. If the study had relied wholly upon quantitative data no such understanding would have been gained, that is, the results would have shown high stress for both groups but given no insights into the very different experiences leading to the high scores.

Discussion

The descriptions the girls gave of their lives and their expressions of stress produced data that can only allude to their identity status (as defined by Marcia, 1994) and awareness of their own ethnicity.

Most Asian girls described themselves as 'living between two worlds'. Safia put it,

"Well we are two sort of British Asian young girls. We have two sorts of characteristics. The one half of sort of cultural stuff, and college stuff. Once you are at home you think, 'I've got my religious duties and my household duties and I've got my college work'; and I have to think, 'Which one do I put first?'"

This response is in keeping with the main body of research into the formation of ethnic identity. The studies of Ghuman (1994; 1995; 1996) and Modood et al. (1997) confirm that the majority of Asian adolescents prefer an *acculturation* or integration mode of adaptation. Ghuman (1999) defines acculturation as,

"The process by which immigrants adopt the way of life of their host society." (Page 66)

At one end of the *acculturation* continuum are those who make minimum adjustment to their lifestyles (*accommodation*), and at the other are those who become completely absorbed into the host culture (*assimilation*).

Shahida explains her position:

“There are two different influences. One is at home and one is in the outside. The Western influences outside the home. We have to keep away from those influences because of our tradition. It’s hard. Whatever you choose to follow... it’s hard.”

By following a *hybrid* or *bi-cultural* path, many Asian young women walk a precarious route, with the accompanying stresses of home and college. Talbani and Hasanali (2000) emphasised the difficulties that many South Asian adolescent girls face in a Western culture, and conclude that Asian young women find it difficult to negotiate between cultural control and individual freedom. Sharma (1999) found that the British Asian girls involved in his research were more vulnerable to stress and feeling hassled and, like the young women in this study, they often found it difficult to communicate with their parents.

Ghuman (1999) asserts that Marcia’s (1994) *foreclosure* status of identity, where the views of parents and significant others are taken on without exploration, mirrors the identity status of most first-generation Asians. However, there was very little evidence from the data that the Asian girls at Piper College had taken on any views without at least some thought or questioning. Where there appeared to be low stress, the young women seemed to have thought about the issues and had either decided to adopt their parent’s views or had come to their own conclusions, with the support of their parents.

Fazia explained,

“I wouldn’t want people to think that Asian parents aren’t understanding; maybe they see life in a different way. They want a better future for us. There are different ways of living, different cultures and stuff. I think it is good that we can have both and it is fun.”

Many girls, like Fazia, were happy to adopt a bi-cultural approach. However, others were adamant that they wanted to stay within their parent’s world. During the group interview with the young women who received support for special educational needs, a heated debate took place. Delara and Noreen expressed their feelings with humour, saying that they were going to stay at home to be ‘secure’, whereas Shaheeda and Farah wanted to live independently. Delara was aware of

her parent's 'strict' values yet she had made a conscious choice to remain at home.

The greatest source of stress seemed to come from a real desire not to hurt parents' feelings by rejecting their values and traditions. Nadia had obviously given the matter some thought when she said,

"You see, what parents don't realise is that because we have been brought up in a Western community, we are so Westernised. We still have our ethnic origin in us but our thinking is very different now. I don't want to rebel my family. I love my parents. I don't want to fight them."

Many young women were aware that their parents were frightened about their children losing their cultural roots and being completely swallowed up by Western culture. Nazira explained,

"It's really difficult. They (parents) are so traditional... they follow what they have been brought up on. We've got a huge gap. I think it's like they are Asians, they are thinking, 'If we adapt to this Western culture, we are going to lose all of our traditional values'. They think they might forget what it was like and become completely different people. So... I think they are trying to bring that out for who we are."

The level of stress for many Asian girls seemed to be dependent upon the degree to which their parents understood the struggle they had as they formed their own identities. Most young women indicated that they had given much thought to issues concerning their cultural identity and emerging adulthood. There were few, if any, real examples of where girls had taken on the views of their parents without exploration. It seemed that most were involved in Phinney's (1989) three-stage progression towards the development and internalisation of ethnic identity. However, this study found that where a 'preference' was shown for the dominant home culture, no assumptions could be made about a lack of exploration of the issues involved. The girls were well aware that, in retaining Asian traditions and philosophies, they had to contend with challenges from Western society. Rumana commented,

"With Asians, you know that your life is different from many here (at college) you put it down to life being that way. You just have to accept it and that's the only way to cope with it."

Some young women spoke with confidence about who they were, and it might be said that they had reached *identity achievement* and were experiencing only low levels of stress. However, it would seem to me that a more fluid notion of identity achievement might last a lifetime, with constant adjustments in the development of personal constructs. The *life-span* psychological approach supports this view, in suggesting that development takes place over time, with no special state of maturity assumed (Baltes et.al. 1980). Most Asian girls involved in the study expressed an awareness of moderate levels of stress, usually bound up with how significant others responded to them at home and college. As Bronfenbrenner (1977) pointed out, the external environments and interactions of home, college and peers have a continuous and reciprocal influence upon adolescent development.

Levels of anxiety seemed to be increased where girls were aiming at assimilation into Western society. Iram was worried about the influence her parents had on her and asserted,

“I should learn from it... not to be like them.”

Only one young woman, Amina, presented as experiencing extremely high levels of stress, and it might be assumed that she was at Marcia's (1994) *moratorium or identity crisis* stage of development. Amina put it,

“I mix between the Asian society and Westernised and I don't know what to choose. Everything is so confusing.”

The Asian young women attending Piper College spoke about the tensions that result from trying to ‘bridge the gap’ between home and college. These experiences were complex in themselves. In addition, the Asian girls faced issues about collectivism and individualism that were also central to the development of their ethnic identities. Triandis (1995) challenges the notion that Western psychological theories are universal and suggests that the cultural patterns represented by individualism and collectivism lead people to view the world differently. Triandis asserts that the majority of the world, including Asia, is collectivist whilst European-derived cultures are more individualistic. Kausikan (1993) opined,

“Most Asians do not want to be considered good Westerners, even if they are friendly to the West. Many in Asia believe that the West’s persistent economic problems stem from their emphasis on individual rights.”
(Page 62 – 63)

Of course, there are those who give priority to personal goals and yet live in a collectivist society, just as there are those who give priority to the goals of the family or wider community (for example), and yet live in an individualistic society. The Asian girl at Piper College is mindful of the need to support the *bradari*, or kinship of the family and community, and yet is exposed to the constant pressure to achieve individual success when at college.

Rabia described the essence of collectivism when she said,

“I think that what we have got ... a lot ... in our community ... we have got that bond between families and everything. I think you can just feel it more among Asian people; I don’t know why but I think you can. Yes, it is that bond everyone has. No matter whether you know them or not... you feel OK.”

Rehana said she ‘felt sad’ for non-Asian women living on their own because they have no one to turn to for support. She added,

“I think that for all of us, everyone sticks with everyone. Like if someone needs money or help or something; or if their husband’s died... everyone is there for everyone. In some English families you are on your own. You deal with it. It’s your own affair ... you are on your own.”

Where Asian girls wanted to be more independent from their families and community, tensions and stress increased. Farah explained that her parents wanted her to be a ‘normal Muslim’ but that she had to ‘find it’ for herself. She said,

“You have got to be pushy and to go and get it. You need your determination to keep on.”

Some girls were adamant that they wanted ‘a separate life’ from their parents, without having to be dependent upon anyone. Fatimah commented that she wanted to move away and ‘experience different things’ without being ‘suffocated by the family’. Amina (case study one) had sought total independence and left the family home but she said she felt very alone and was worried because she could not support herself financially. In tears, Amina explained,

“Now I have grown up and I am doing my own thing, it’s like they don’t want to know me anymore. Mum thinks I should be like other so-called Asian girls and stay at home but I think I should learn for myself... but I haven’t got my family.”

In her effort to achieve independence, Amina had cut herself off from her family and found herself to be without any source of support.

The interviews with non-Asian girls revealed that they all aspired to be financially and socially independent from their parents. To them, this was seen as part of ‘growing up’ and becoming an adult. Most of the non-Asian young women viewed their parents as encouraging their independence and drive to achieve individualistic goals. The Asian girls in the study spoke about the shared values of their family and community and their awareness that they had a role to play in supporting the *bradari*. In Amina’s case, she had tried to assimilate into an individualistic, non-Asian environment and found herself to have lost everything, including her sense of who she was. Most Asian girls enjoyed the comforts and protection of the family and community and used the individualistic setting of Piper College to explore their individual ideals. Where they felt their parents acknowledged the necessity for them to meet college expectations of independent study skills and individual academic success, the Asian young women experienced lower levels and stress and anxiety. For some, the collectivistic environment of home gave them a sense of security and a place where they could escape the pressures of Western society.

Yoder (2000) maintains that much identity research often focuses on psychological and internal exploration, which suggests a rather passive environment. Yoder, and others (Friedenberg, 1959; Erikson, 1980; Cote and Allahaar, 1994), have pointed out that changing social structures may directly impact and limit the conditions under which a young person may experience ‘adolescence’. The notion of *barriers* was introduced by Yoder as a way of conceptualising the external limitations that are imposed upon processes of identity development. In the context of this study, the Asian young women face potential *barriers*, from both home and college, which are represented by the collectivist and individualist values of the two settings.

The data revealed clear evidence that, where Asian young women felt that they had few interpersonal issues to deal with at any one time, they had the resources to cope with low or moderate levels of stress. High levels of anxiety were experienced where girls felt confusion about their ethnic identity. Young women like Amina (case study one), were trying to decide whether or not the values of their parents and community were worth holding on to. They seemed to be trying to separate from a collectivistic environment whilst being confused about what it was they were trying to achieve in an individualistic environment.

Coleman and Hendry (1990; 1999) assert that most adolescents 'pace themselves through the adolescent transition' in an effort to avoid 'storm and stress'. They maintain that young people,

"Hold back on one issue, while they are grappling with another. Most sense what they can and cannot cope with, and will... be an active agent in their own development." (Page 214)

If that is so, then Asian young women start from a position where they have a longer 'menu' of issues to deal with during their passage into adulthood. The usual elements of adolescence are interwoven into a complex tapestry and include threads integral to the formation of ethnic identity. For an Asian girl, her ethnicity is also part of the formation of her sexual identity, physical maturity, the development of her cognitive and social skills and her identity achievement. Because she inhabits two very different worlds, the core constructs, values, beliefs and habits of the Asian girl will inevitably be challenged by her family and/or those she meets in the college setting. The majority of Asian girls appear to experience moderate levels of stress as they face the challenges and negotiate the formation of a bi-cultural ethnic identity. It may be that, in the process of negotiation, Asian young women develop their interpersonal skills and that although the process may be stressful, their emotional maturity is significantly advanced.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Coping Strategies

Introduction

Chapter eight presents data that focuses upon the coping strategies used by Asian young women at home, in the community and when at Piper College. This chapter also examines the more psychological aspects of coping that are used by some girls in their efforts to determine, and come to terms with, their own identity. The girls speak about how they cope with stress at home and how their relationships with family members affect their ability to cope. Chapter eight then explores the ways in which the young women cope in the college environment. This includes reflections on their friendships, attitude to work and their views on how staff respond to their needs and their own reaction to the college system. The data presentation then goes on to give examples of how girls view their identities. Once again, the comments of Asian girls with identified special educational needs are included, along with the views of non-Asian girls. The three case study 'vignettes' are revisited and the coping strategies of Amina, Sadia and Shahida are discussed. The results of the Adolescent Coping Scale (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1993) are then presented. Finally, the chapter closes with discussion focusing upon the analytical model and implications for theory.

The NVIVO computer software package (Qualitative Solutions and Research, 1999) was again used in the data analysis. Figure 8.1 illustrates the themes that arose from interview transcripts and serves as a summary of issues raised in the girls' discussions about how they cope with stress.

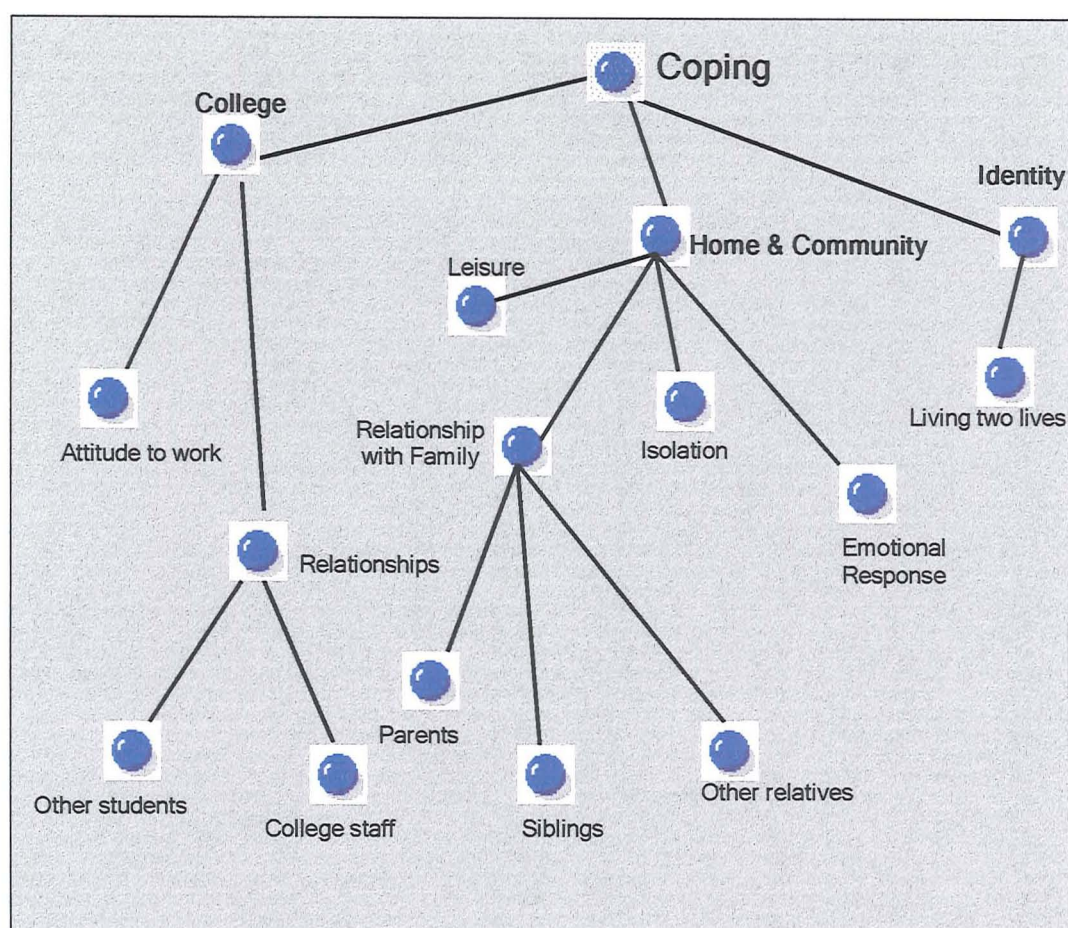


Figure 8.1 Graphic Model of Emergent Themes: Asian Girls' Coping Strategies

The Coping Strategies of Asian Young Women

At Home and in the Asian Community

Relationships with Family Members

With Parents

One theme that established itself in all interviews was that of relationships with parents. When speaking about how they cope at home, the girls were unanimous in their response: they do not discuss personal issues with their parents. However, those girls who experienced low levels of stress clearly enjoyed closer relationships with their parents when compared to the parent/daughter relationships of those who were extremely anxious.

Young women who spoke about being relatively stress-free described how their parents supported their decision to attend college and were always available to discuss work-related problems. Halema said she felt 'more relaxed' with her family. Farah described how her father had disagreed with the opinions of the extended family when comments had been made about college being a 'bad' place for girls. She said,

“ My dad goes, ‘You can go as high as you want, we will support you all the way’. If I have a problem it is straight to them (parents) and they sort it out for me. Only today in the car, my dad goes, ‘ Am I a good dad?’ I said, ‘Dad you are a very nice dad.’ (Laughter) He grabbed my hand and put it to his heart and said, ‘I want to be the best dad’. I was like, ‘You are, you are!’.”

Farah went on to say that she knew she must not ‘take advantage’ and that she had to work hard. For the girls who were able to talk to their parents about problems, there were definite boundaries around acceptable topics of conversation. In their view, parents would never being able to relate to personal or ‘emotional’ topics, for example, issues about boys, and thus college work was the only subject discussed at home.

It became apparent that where young women experienced greater amounts of stress, they often felt their parents to be 'distant'. When these girls were asked if they ever discussed difficulties with their parents, there were great displays of emotion, with many shouting their reply: 'NO!' Regila said that the only time she might tell her parents about problems was if she feared tutors might inform them about her misdemeanours in college. She felt that she had 'been lucky' in that, despite the 'trouble' she had caused in the past, her parents continued to allow her to attend college. Sayka and Parmeet thought that they would talk to their mothers if 'something was really bad'. Sayka added that she felt her mum would understand because of her own experiences.

With Siblings and Other Relatives

Several girls mentioned older sisters as providing support and understanding. Fabia spoke about her married sisters who did not live at home but to whom she felt she could go with personal problems. Noria said that she appreciated her brother's alternative viewpoint in that he 'looks at things differently'. She added that, although he cares about her, he did not always know what to say.

Where important decisions were to be made, for example, marriage choices, the girls were aware that their parents had to be involved in discussing personal issues. Some young women were often reticent to speak directly to their parents, preferring instead to speak to other relatives who would then act as 'go-betweens'. Asma described how she would speak to her sister-in-law, who would then talk to her older brother. Asma felt that she could trust her sister-in-law and brother to represent her views to her parents. Some young women told of how female cousins might have had similar college experiences and were thus more able to understand their problems. Shazia described her Aunt's sister as being 'like my other mum', saying that she could 'really talk to her' although she did not see her very often. It seemed that, for many Asian girls, those outside the immediate family represented safety and confidentiality, especially where there were shared experiences.

In some cases, young women felt that in taking on more Western views and in becoming more independent from their families, they had alienated themselves and could therefore not look to their relatives for support. These girls experienced higher levels of stress in that they felt they were coping alone and outside the family. Ghazalia expressed it:

“I think if it is personal stress, the less they know the better... just keep it to yourself.”

Ruhana spoke about family members who were ‘safe’ to confide in and those who were not. She went on to say,

“My step-sister doesn’t want to know me. Even though she was half-white. I thought she would understand but she is really traditional. She has been through what I have been through and she thinks I shouldn’t do it, but I think I should learn for myself.”

Ruhana wanted to break away from family customs but in doing so, she cut herself off from family support.

Leisure Activities

When it came to discussing leisure activities, it was obvious that most of the young women did not take part in group or social activities as a way of relaxing or coping with stress. All leisure at home seemed to be carried out in a solitary way. Many girls mentioned that listening to music was a great source of comfort when they were anxious. Some girls described how they would go to their rooms and try to ‘forget about everything’. Aysha put it,

“Well, if I am not coping, I like to listen to music and blot everything out.”

Other activities mentioned included eating chocolate or smoking (in secret).

Emotion and Isolation

For some Asian young women, it was evident that an inability to solve problems or to 'make anything better' resulted in overwhelming feelings of frustration and anger. Fatimah described it:

“ I do nothing. I just take it all in... that is what gets me angry.”

It seems that, in some cases, all emotion is held back until the girls are alone. Miram and Nadia spoke of keeping 'everything inside' until they were able to lock themselves in their rooms and 'sit and cry'. In one extreme case, Amina (case study one) described how, when she had gone to outside agencies for help, she had been referred to a women's hostel. This had frightened her since she viewed the hostel as a place of 'isolation from everything', saying, "I would be alone".

Amina told of how, in her distress, she would stay in her room 'like a prisoner'. Clearly, Amina experienced high and extreme levels of stress, whilst those girls who were able to find sympathy and understanding, when talking to friends or female relatives, had a release mechanism which ensured that they were able to cope with anxieties as they arose.

At College

Relationships with Other Students

It quickly became apparent during the interviews that the Asian girls' greatest source of support came from each other. The evidence was clear: their close friendships represented Asian kinship, which at least ensured mutual understanding, even when there were no obvious solutions to problems. In talking to each other they increased their capacity to cope. The Asian young women felt that they did not have to 'act in a certain way' with each other, since, as Farah put it, they came 'from the same roots'. Quahida said,

"I think that it is because there are so many Asians that are in the same situation. It is alright because you have someone there who understands."

A sense of shared understanding formed the basis of the girls' friendships. Sayka and Yasmin's conversation demonstrates this:

Sayka: "As soon as I see her I think, 'We can talk, we know what it is like'. But another person (non-Asian) can listen but they might not understand."

Yasmin: "Yes, because we are in a similar situation I can start a conversation and she can just say the ending; it will be what I was going to say. She understands and it makes you think you are not going mad."

Many of the girls were in agreement that, although their problems could not always be solved because they were trying to bridge the gap between two very different cultures, just talking about their difficulties brought relief. Sadia made her friends laugh when she said,

"I would get with my friends and we would slag off our family, slag off the community and say how crap life is, then get on with your work!"

A minority of Asian young women described how, rather than risk their secrets being 'gossiped about' in the Asian community, they preferred to disclose their worries to non-Asian girls. Rehana explained that this was because, although they would think 'you are a bit mad' and 'won't understand', it was safer and easier to 'tell them everything'. Prabyn described how, by telling several close friends of her difficulties, she was able to get many ideas and perspectives about what to do. She added that she was not able to take the advice of her friend who was a Christian since it would go against family culture and tradition. It seemed that friendships were tested if there was disagreement about how to maintain Asian cultural values in college.

The young women were clearly able to ascertain which of the Asian girls held similar beliefs and ideas to them. If friends were deemed to be like-minded, their advice would be sought. Some girls described how, depending upon the type of problem, they would seek advice accordingly, whilst others told of how they

would 'sort out' their own problems. Pradi said that she tried to 'ignore' herself by helping others, in the hope that she could forget her own difficulties.

In a few cases girls experienced high levels of stress and felt that they were totally unable to cope. These girls described feeling isolated, alone and with few friends in whom they could confide. Fatima spoke about how, in college, 'everyone keeps themselves to themselves'. She said that other Asian girls did not ever ask her how she was and felt that they did not want to know her. Amina (case study one) seemed to have very few sources of support. She felt that her isolation from the Asian community stemmed from her Western appearance and behaviour. Amina went on,

"If I talk to my Asian friends, well I can't talk to them because their life is out there and their parents... and they say, 'Amina you can't do this'. They can't go out and they say, 'How come you are not like me?' They talk about me and they say, 'Oh, Amina stayed out late'. I feel that they don't know what I am going through or what my family is going through. It is all right with my white mates. They would understand."

In moving from her family and Asian community, Amina had lost a source of support. She saw isolation from other Asian girls as being her only option since she felt they disapproved of her and would admonish her behaviour rather than offer support. Amina relied upon her white friends to understand her bid for independence, although she continued to suffer extreme anxiety, which she seemed unable to stem.

Relationships with College Staff

When it came to approaching college staff for help and support, the girls were in agreement: they would not talk to teachers about their problems. There were a few exceptions. Shazia commented that if problems were 'really serious' then she would have to talk to her senior tutor. However, Shazia made it clear that only issues related to college work would be discussed. Rayla mentioned that she was able to talk to a female Asian tutor, since 'she knows how you feel' and 'she

will understand'. Rayla went on to say that other tutors might listen but that 'they won't understand'. Amina (case study one) explained that she had met a female Asian counsellor. This service came from an outside agency and offered weekly group sessions. However, she had only attended on a few occasions since she did not 'have the time' and felt pressured by work deadlines.

Many young women felt that they did not know staff well enough to confide in them. Sofina and Halima spoke about supportive teachers in their secondary schools. Sofiana added that one teacher had been 'more like a friend' since she 'used to talk to everyone really normally'. The girls described the relationships with schoolteachers that had built up over time, with 'trust' being a key element. Delara explained:

"Here, if I am stressed I wouldn't go to teachers, I don't know them very well. The teachers at school, well I had known them for five years. But a teacher you just met in college, they're not going to know how you are feeling inside, unless they actually ask how you feel and you need to tell them."

Several girls agreed that they would only approach college staff if 'things were really bad' and even then they would have to choose the staff member carefully. Asking tutors for assistance was seen as a last resort since, as Fatima commented,

"No-one would actually want to talk to staff ... we would prefer to talk to our friends. Why should you be the only one?"

There was recognition that some members of staff, namely Ann (learning support), Beth (manager for pastoral care) and Lisa (pastoral tutor), were more approachable and understanding than others. The girls were keenly aware of which tutors they might approach. During the interviews, only four female members of staff were named as being readily available to listen and respond in a supportive way. Sobia put it:

"I don't think teachers would know about problems, but different teachers can pick up... like Miss Thorpe. Ages ago we were sort of talking like this and she was saying, 'You've got good points but there are some things about your grammar. She asked me about it and showed an interest, which I think is good. If teachers show an interest I make an effort. If they don't care, why should I? They are just doing their job.'"

During the girls' conversations about their tutors, it became apparent that they saw it as unusual if teachers took an interest in them as individuals. Several young women mentioned that Beth, the manager for pastoral care, seemed to notice if they had difficulties or were 'distracted'. Shafina was almost jubilant when she said,

"Like one day I was not really myself and Beth she noticed... she picked it up... she noticed... she could tell. But the rest of them... none of them have the time, they have such big classes... they haven't the time."

It was almost as if the girls thought that tutors 'showing an interest' were performing outside the remit of their jobs. They did not seem to expect staff to relate to them as individuals, since tutors were 'too busy with their own work'. Interestingly, as pastoral care manager, Beth's role encompassed one of the heaviest workloads yet she was perceived as 'having time' for the girls. Indeed she felt herself to be so stretched that she eventually left the college.

Several times during the interviews, the young women said that they thought tutors were there to teach and as Shagufta put it, 'not to get involved in our personal lives'. Indeed, Halima commented that she did not 'see teachers that often'. Fazia said, "we are in the background", implying that students are seen as peripheral to what goes on at college.

Some girls thought that staff categorised them as being 'a success' or 'a failure'. These categories became more complex if, in the opinion of the young women, staff stereotyped them as having 'Asian girl problems'. Nadia expressed it:

"Well you get things like newspapers or whatever. I think they (teachers) just get a little bit and they think that's it. But every person's got something different. They (teachers) think, 'Oh they are Asian and that is what the problem is... arranged marriages and this and that', like it is around these things that Asians have problems. But everyone is different."

She went on to say,

"I don't really blame them because it is so difficult for them to understand."

Several girls spoke about the 'two worlds' and the 'culture between us', the general feeling being that staff could never truly understand their situation and it was not within their teaching role to get involved in 'personal lives'.

Attitude to Work

The topic of 'coping with work' rarely arose during the interviews; the girls were more involved in discussing how they try to cope with personal issues. However, on the few occasions that college work was spoken about, the young women related how, if they felt that assignments were overwhelming them, they would try to 'not think about it' as a way of 'blanking it out'. Aysha said,

"I put it off and end up doing nothing. You leave it and put it off."

There was no mention of seeking assistance from tutors, since the girls seemed to suggest that they were expected to be autonomous in completing tasks and preparing for examinations. If they needed help with their work, they would rather ask each other than go to college staff.

Identity: Living Two Lives

One coping strategy adopted by some young women involved living two separate lives: at home and at college. Shahida said how, when at home, she becomes detached from college life:

"It's weird because when I come into college, the work is the number one priority. When I get in through that door (at home), I leave my bag for a week and this morning I was trying to find it. The atmosphere totally changes. There are always things at home that are more important, like if someone is ill you drop everything. My parents don't understand."

Several girls spoke of how they adopt a different persona when not at home.

Shazia described her method of coping with stress, revealing that she goes into

town and carries out 'dares' that she normally would not do, for example, singing songs to strangers and shouting in the street.

Parveen, who always wears a shalwar kameez and scarf, explained that she felt uncomfortable when other Asian young women make visible changes to their appearance in order to 'fit in' at college. She commented,

"The thing I hate about mainly Asian girls, especially the ones with the scarves... maybe they are restricted to wear them... but as soon as they get to college they go in the toilet and take them off and put on makeup."

Parveen felt that these girls were denying their Asian cultural roots and were letting the community down.

It seemed that the more independent and detached the young women were from their families, the higher the levels of stress. This was especially so for girls whose behaviour was far removed from traditional cultural norms. Amina (case study one) felt that it was difficult to socialise with her Asian peers since they were expected to return home in the early evening. Her 'white mates' were not able to completely understand her situation and thus Amina felt herself to be torn between the two worlds. She put it,

"I mix between the Asian society and Westernised and I don't know what to choose. Everything is so confusing".

Coping, for Amina, meant loneliness and isolation, since she described herself as being worry-free only when alone and 'out in the fresh air'.

The Coping Strategies of Asian Young Women with Identified Special Educational Needs

Introduction

Chapter eight revealed that, although there seemed to be few contrasts between the comments of Asian girls and Asian girls with special educational needs, there

were some indications that the *SEN* group experienced lower levels of perceived stress in the college setting. The following section attempts to analyse which coping strategies and support structures contributed to the apparent differences.

At Home and in the Asian Community

The Asian girls in the *SEN* group made no mention of directly asking family members for help, with most girls preferring to keep their personal difficulties to themselves. However, Delara's description of life at home indicated that she sees herself as being protected by her mother, for which she is grateful. Delara's learning difficulties and periods of ill health have caused family concern. This has meant that younger sisters have taken on household tasks for fear of Delara becoming ill. In general, the young women in the *SEN* group felt that family members were aware of their specific needs and, although difficulties could not always be ameliorated, such awareness enabled them to cope.

At College

Relationships and College Response

Like the other Asian girls, the young women with *SENs* spoke about the benefits of having supportive friendships in college. Farah emphasised the importance of her 'best mate' knowing about her specific problems (directional hearing difficulty) and was grateful that her friend sat with her at the front of the class.

During the interview with the *SEN* group, it quickly became obvious that the prime source of support came from Ann, a learning support tutor. All four girls were unanimous in their praise of her. Delara spoke for them all when she said,

“So many times I have come crying to Ann saying, ‘I can’t deal with my

work, I want to leave... I can't handle the stress and the teachers give me hassle'. Only one person stood by me and that was Ann. She was determined that I would get a pass, the teachers weren't. I really trust her. I don't trust the teachers as much as I trust her."

Delara went on to describe how her family had thought that she would 'get nowhere' because of her disability (learning difficulties), and how, when they saw how well she was doing, they had started to believe in her. Delara attributed much of her success to Ann's encouragement and support since she had started doing things for herself. She commented,

"It has got a lot to do with how far I have got... to do with Ann."

Ann's assistance had had far-reaching effects, in that Delara's parents and siblings were proud of her and regarded her in a more positive way. The girls realised that Ann's time was stretched and Delara acknowledged this when she said,

"She helps me as much as she can... I even take more hours than I should."

Farah told of how, whenever she has difficulties or if tutors are unaware of her hearing loss, Ann goes to other teachers and acts as an advocate on her behalf. Noreen was grateful for Ann's help in proof-reading her assignments and described how Ann would seek her out to check if all was well. It seemed that Ann's role in supporting the girls was complex and extensive. She was viewed as being the key person, the 'one to depend on', and would 'take on' the college system if necessary, discussing problems with tutors as they arose. Farah explained how she had always relied on someone to help her, whether it was the school nurse or a subject teacher when at secondary school, or Ann at Piper College. She put it,

"Whenever I need her she always tries to help me."

It seemed that Ann was available and visible to the girls; she liaised with other members of staff and took an active role in pursuing the success of each girl in the *SEN* group.

Although Ann was central to the coping strategies of the *SEN* group, one other teacher was specifically mentioned: Lisa, a subject teacher. Noreen felt that she could disclose personal details to Lisa, knowing that 'she will keep it to herself'.

Farah thought that some teachers would ask if there were any problems and 'try to pick up on it'. Shahida said that, in general, teachers 'are very supportive' and that it was 'nice knowing' that they had faith in her to 'get the grades'.

Ann (*SEN* support teacher), Lisa (subject teacher) and Beth (Pastoral Care) were named as enabling the girls to cope. However, the girls in the *SEN* group had strong feelings about other members of staff. Delara voiced her concerns:

"I think the teachers expect us to work around them. They won't work around us. We have got a problem yes. They expect you to go around it ... not them helping us. They said, obviously they can't make an assignment easier... they expect you to go to the key skills area and do it yourself."

The girls perceived there to be a conflict for staff between the need to promote independent working skills and the offer of help and support. The young women in the *SEN* group did not feel that staff truly understood their situation. The tutors' goal of enabling students to work independently was not viewed positively by the girls. Farah said,

"In trying to cope with stress and everything... what does a form tutor do? It doesn't help. They say, 'Try to organize everything and balance your work'. You can't do it. They think everything is easy when it is not. They think you are lazy or that you don't want to do it. They sometimes don't understand why you can't do it."

Although their needs are made formal by the issuing of a 'statement', it seemed that the young women thought that some staff were unaware of their difficulties. Delara said, with some emotion,

"I don't think they want to know."

It was apparent that the girls with *SENs* thought that the staff at Piper College were preoccupied with ensuring academic success based on independent learning skills. For the young women in the *SEN* group, this was daunting since they all relied on specific support and help. The apparent preoccupation with results overshadowed their needs and made it difficult to ask for help in the classroom. Ann clearly fulfilled the supportive role with unsurpassed skill and more than made up for the perceived lack of sensitivity to need that the girls experienced in some lessons. For the young women in the *SEN* group, college seemed a positive

and rewarding place to be, but this was only made possible by the assistance of Ann.

Attitude to Work

In general, the young women in the SEN group demonstrated a positive attitude towards their work. They recognised that they needed assistance but were also keen to work independently. Shahida commented that she had 'learned to cope' on her own and was grateful for her 'own space' when in college. The girls in this group took pride in their work and felt themselves to be successful.

Identity: Living two Lives

None of the girls in the SEN group spoke about 'living two lives' or having different personas at home and at college. They seemed to feel that they were accepted for who they were in both environments and made no reference to having to behave differently in either setting.

The Coping Strategies of Non-Asian Young Women

Introduction

Chapter seven indicated that non-Asian girls experienced low to moderate levels of stress arising from the need to become independent and achieve academic success. The following section presents the girls' views on how they cope at

home and college, and highlights some of the differences between their strategies and those of Asian young women.

At Home and in the Local Community

Relationships with Family Members

Asian young women were adamant that they would not discuss personal problems with their parents. This was in marked contrast to non-Asian girls, many of whom said their immediate reaction to difficulties would be to tell their parents. Carla commented that her parents 'spend a lot of time sorting out' family difficulties. Angela added that she would talk to her parents about personal relationship problems. Sue explained how she would choose the appropriate parent to 'moan to' and said,

"If my mum is irritating me, which she does quite often... bless her ... I can have a moan to my dad about it. If my dad gets on my nerves, I go to my mum."

Many *NA* young women described close relationships with their mothers, and, when asked whom they first turn to for help, many named their mums. Tamika said her mother 'believed' in her and Sonia thought that her mother would be especially likely to notice if she seemed 'quiet or really down'. Caryn mentioned that, if there were difficult issues to be discussed, her mother would 'warn' her father saying, "Don't stress her, she is stressed enough as it is".

Several *NA* girls acknowledged that they were not always easy to live with at home and that their parents did not always agree with their views and decisions. Vicky said she often got into 'a frenzy' and found her mother's responses to be 'completely pointless'. Heather described herself as being in 'a teenage phase', she continued,

"It is hard for them (parents) to tell. We are so sulky anyway; there might not be something wrong. If my mum asks if there is something wrong, I would be sulky anyway... I am a sulky teenager. But if there was a

genuine problem I would talk to her. She has made it clear that I can tell her anything and she assumes that I will.”

Sonia added that her mother always sees her as a ‘miserable bitch’ and is constantly asking what the problem is.

The parent/daughter relationships for the *NA* girls seemed to be complex. On the one hand, the young women sought help from their parents, but on the other hand, they wanted to remain independent. The girls described how their parents would ask if they needed advice or support and how the girls would then decide if they wanted parental involvement in their personal lives. The locus of control about the nature of parent/daughter relationships seemed to rest with the girls themselves. This was in marked contrast to the majority of Asian young women interviewed who said they would not confide in their parents but preferred to cope alone with personal difficulties.

The *NA* girls did not refer to siblings as possible sources of support.

Leisure Activities

Several *NA* young women described leisure activities that would help relieve stress. These included: listening to music, eating chocolate and playing sport. Some girls viewed their part-time jobs as a way of de-stressing since they were ‘kept occupied’. Unlike the Asian young women, the leisure activities of non-Asian girls often involved being with other people.

Emotion and Isolation

In contrast to the Asian girls interviewed, the non-Asian young women did not specifically refer to ‘staying on their own’ as a way of coping with stress.

However, several *NA* girls described the emotional outbursts they would often have at home. Miriam said that she often shouts and cries at home. Vicky spoke about shouting and screaming, adding that when at work she tried to remain calm but that, upon her return home, she would 'slam about and then go and collapse and cry'. The *NA* girls seemed to make more dramatic displays of emotion when at home than the non-Asian young women, and unlike their Asian peers, the *NA* girls did not try to conceal their feelings.

Independent Problem Solving

Whilst the Asian young women did not refer directly to independent problem-solving as a way of coping with stressors, two non-Asian girls spoke about their wish to be independent from their families, preferring to 'sort things out for themselves'. Caryn put it,

"I tend to make out that I am the worst off in the whole world. I always do that. I am clearly not, but you just need somewhere to vent it. You don't expect anyone to solve it for you... you sort yourself out."

It seemed that Caryn coped with anxieties by releasing her emotions and frustrations at home. She did not seek advice from her family but preferred to solve her own difficulties.

At College

Relationships and College Response

Like their Asian peers, the non-Asian girls' female friendships provided their greatest source of support when in college. Caryn put it,

“My best friend, we go through the same things and she has a kind of idea of what I go through and I have a kind of idea of what she goes through.”

Maria said that she would usually talk to several people to ‘get their advice’. She continued,

“I talk to my mum, my friends, my boyfriend, and if I can’t cope, I end up crying, or I just sit in the bath and try to sleep it off.”

Vicky described college as a ‘relaxing and friendly place’ since she is surrounded by her friends.

In general, the *NA* young women were more likely to approach college staff for help than Asian girls. Two of the *NA* group said that they would never tell teachers about their difficulties, either personal or work related. However, other *NA* young women made it clear that, if they asked for help, they would choose the staff member carefully. The *NA* girls were more inclined to speak to tutors where a relationship had been developed, for example, with personal or subject tutors. Tamika explained,

“I think if they (teachers) can relate to you then they can help... it depends
how well you get along with them.”

Miriam said that teachers would be ‘likely to ignore you’ if ‘you didn’t get on with them’. Several *NA* girls were aware that the tutors had their own difficulties to deal with, and their response would depend upon how stressed the teachers were themselves. Caryn put it,

“They have so many crises to deal with.”

Angela told of an occasion when she had tried to tell a teacher about a difficulty but the teacher had said, “That’s nice” and waved her away. Sonia remarked that one tutor held the view that students should not have jobs when at college and she felt, since she was working part time, that this effectively prevented her from asking for his assistance.

The *NA* girls held a lively debate about how they felt staff viewed the students. They thought that many tutors focused upon the end result, that is the successful completion of a course, rather than any difficulties encountered along the way. Sonia expressed this view:

“The only way teachers would know if you were having a problem would be if you had done particularly badly. Then they can see... ‘cos if you are not doing the work, they see it as laziness really. Then, if you don’t do it, you get kicked off the course rather than them saying, ‘What’s the matter? Why aren’t you doing it?’.”

It seemed that the girls were reticent to approach staff for advice, for fear of being seen as ‘lazy’ or ‘failing’.

The *NA* young women supported each other and, on occasions when there seemed to be no alternative, would ask staff for help. However, they were very specific about which teachers they thought would be prepared to listen and help, and the girls felt that some tutors would not welcome their requests for assistance.

Attitude to Work

As with Asian young women, the *NA* girls said they would speak to each other if there were difficulties with college work. However, three of the *NA* girls talked about the ‘problem-solving’ approach they would take when under pressure. Sue explained,

“When I am stressed, I think it through.... Can I do anything about it? Like if there is a deadline and you haven’t done it, you think, ‘Can I do anything about it?’ You think of ways of doing something about it.”

Andrea commented that she ‘can’t really be bothered to get worked up’ and prefers to leave college as soon as lessons are finished. For many *NA* young women, their attitude towards college work was based upon their ability to complete tasks. If an assignment was seen as too difficult from the outset, they would ‘try not to worry about it’ but do the best they could.

Case Study ‘Vignettes’

Chapter seven introduced three Asian young women, Amina, Sadia and Shahida, as examples of those with low, moderate and high levels of stress. Their stories serve to illustrate some of the differences between their ‘lived experiences’ as a way of bringing reality to the data presentation. This section revisits their lives in order to focus upon the contrasts in their coping strategies, and upon how their capacity to cope affected their experiences.

Case Study One: Amina’s Story (High Stress)

Amina felt torn between the two worlds of home and college, feeling alienated and uncomfortable in both settings. Her capacity to cope seemed to be hampered by the conflicting demands of the two environments. When Amina’s home situation became intolerable, she went to live at her sister-in-law’s house. Amina felt that she was able to talk to her sister-in-law but was aware that she had her own problems to deal with. At one stage, Amina asked social services for help. She was referred to a women’s hostel but Amina was scared about isolation and loneliness and therefore she did not follow up the referral. Eventually, Amina went home to stay on occasions, returning to her sister-in-laws when the situation became too stressful. In the evenings, Amina often stayed with white friends and, at the weekends, she would visit her white boyfriend’s home.

In order to support herself, Amina took on a part-time job that prevented her from attending all college lessons and often meant that her assignments were not given in on time. When in college, Amina mixed with white peers but she felt that they were not able to really understand her circumstances because they had not had the same, or similar, experiences. Amina’s main source of comfort came from listening to music or walking in the ‘fresh air’. She said that, at home, she felt like a prisoner in her room. Amina said that she felt able to talk to Ann (learning support teacher) when in dire need but, in contrast, her subject teacher was only interested in regular attendance and completed course work.

Amina's coping strategies did not operate in a coherent way, in that they seemed to conflict with each other, for example: her part-time job was often during college hours, which resulted in absences and late assignments; white friends encouraged Amina to stay out and socialize, activities which alienated her from Asian peers; and in staying away from the family home, Amina separated herself further from her mother, whom she clearly cared for.

Amina's story is one that could so easily have ended in failure and unhappiness. At the time of her initial interview with me, college staff were considering whether or not to allow her to continue. Amina was registered for three A-levels, but was not successfully coping with any of the courses. She felt that two A-levels were more within her grasp but college policy prevented her from dropping a subject.

At this point, I went beyond my role as a researcher and reverted to my more familiar role of educational psychologist. With Amina's agreement the following plan was put forward:

- All relevant teachers to be informed about Amina's circumstances.
- Counselling sessions to take place fortnightly.
- 'Case discussion' with the senior tutor and learning support department, with a view to Amina dropping one A-level subject.
- Amina to submit a 'hardship' form to release available funds in college.

Following the case discussion I wrote in my fieldwork diary:

Amina asked to drop an A-level. Lisa (senior tutor) seemed sympathetic but was clearly towing the college line with college policy: all students to take three A-levels. I suggested that Amina might be considered as a special educational need's case, to allow her to take only two subjects. I sensed that Lisa really did not think that Amina merited it since she spoke about the bureaucratic processes that would need to be undertaken. Clearly, emotional difficulties were not seen as 'special needs'... at least not in this case. Amina (who was present) cried several times during the meeting.

Ann discussed Amina's case with all relevant teaching staff as well as Tom, the head of faculty for learning support services. Tom supported the two A-level plan but pointed out that the management 'were not happy'. He was able to offer Amina extra individual tutor sessions to help her complete late assignments. I suggested that I could support the request in writing, clarifying Amina's special educational needs. Tom and I went to see Kish, the director who oversaw the learning support department. My fieldwork diary records:

I briefly presented Amina's case (in a corridor!) and suggested that she could be given special consideration under the 'special needs umbrella'. Kish's response was, "Who can I come back to if she fails her A-levels? Who will be held responsible? Can you (turning to Tom and me) guarantee her success? Under whose performance targets will she fall?" I said that I couldn't guarantee any student's success or failure. Tom replied that as special needs' performance targets were at 97%, he was willing to take her under his auspices. Kish said that an outsider's professional opinion would make a difference and asked if I could write a letter. I agreed to do this but thought to myself, 'I don't understand all of this 'college speak' but what about other students for whom teachers have concerns regarding apparent emotional difficulties... won't their judgement be trusted?'

It seemed that Amina's needs were invisible since they did not fit into a neat, or recognised, special needs category under current FE funding. Kish clearly had to meet targets and be accountable to his colleagues regarding college policy.

I duly wrote the letter (Appendix 15) but Ann informed me that Lisa (senior tutor) was not happy about the decision, taken by Tom and Kish, to allow Amina to drop a subject. Lisa had made it known that the decision should rest with her. Consequently, Amina was put on a 'contract', by Lisa, to ensure that 'minimum grades were achieved': that is, if Amina did not attend regularly and successfully complete assignments, her college place would be in jeopardy. Ann agreed to oversee the contract.

Amina kept to the contract but, as a result, lost her part-time job. By March, Amina had got another part-time job, was receiving regular help from the head of faculty for learning support, and had finished her five counselling sessions. The photography teacher had arranged for Amina to accompany a friend on a college trip to Italy. She was to be the 'official photographer' for the leisure and tourism

course, all expenses paid. This would also provide Amina with extra practice for her photography A-level as well as a boost to her self-esteem.

Following the final 'review' counselling session, I met informally with Amina and her friends. She spoke enthusiastically about the Italian trip and was eager to see Italian friends who were visiting Piper College. Amina, who some weeks before had appeared gaunt and thin, had put on weight and looked extremely healthy and well. During the informal meeting, Amina thanked me and said that she was so much happier.

As a postscript, over a year later, Ann reported that Amina had successfully gained one A-level and obtained a low grade in the other. She is now following a higher education arts course at a university, as well as holding a part-time job, and seems relatively settled and happy. Amina spends most weekends at the home of a white female friend and returns to her mother's house during the week.

Ann commented, with wry humour, that if she were to receive performance-related pay, Amina's results would not bring her any benefits. However, without Ann's consistent support, Amina's course would almost certainly have been terminated and she would have had far fewer opportunities to find success and happiness.

It is important to add that in my involvement with Amina and the college system, I went beyond the prescribed boundaries that are normally associated with researchers. My choice seemed very clear: either I could have steadfastly maintained a researcher's more detached approach or, I could have reverted to my role as an educational psychologist and try to contribute to meeting Amina's needs. I felt that my own sense of moral ethics made it necessary for me to do what I could to help, and that in doing so I was ultimately taking the 'emancipatory' style of research a little further in giving something back to those researched.

Case Study Two: Sadia's Story (Moderate Stress)

When at home, Sadia coped with difficulties by staying in her room. She felt that she could not approach her mother for help, as she would be unlikely to understand. Furthermore, Sadia commented that her mother was trying to cope with her own stress, recently made more profound by the death of Sadia's maternal grandfather. When in college, Sadia said that she would talk to friends but certainly would not discuss personal issues with teachers. She went on to explain that, when in secondary school, she would regularly confide in one particular teacher, who Sadia felt had built a relationship with her over time. Her view was that, at Piper College, staff were there to teach and not to get involved in the lives of their students.

Shahida's Story (Low Stress)

Shahida's coping strategies had included much careful thought. She said that she was very aware of the experiences of many Asians who had had to overcome racism and being perceived by society as having low status. Shahida's response was a desire to learn from their experiences and develop her own opportunities for success. She also spoke about her own responsibility for maintaining family honour. When at home, Shahida said that she coped with difficulties by talking to a female cousin and crying. If there were college related problems she would talk to her parents but would not discuss personal issues with them. She described an open and friendly relationship with her mother, which included humour and having fun. Shahida mentioned that having some contact with her relatives in Pakistan gave her an indefinable strength. In college, Shahida was adamant that she would not talk to teachers, preferring instead to talk to her female Asian friends.

Shahida presented as someone who thought deeply about issues and concerns, not only how events impacted upon her own life, but also how they affected

those in her immediate family and Asian community. In observing Shahida, it could be assumed that she was in Marcia's (1994) identity status of *Foreclosure*, since she had taken on the views of her parents. However, Shahida's sense of identity had clearly been thought through, suggesting that she was approaching Marcia's (1994) status of *Identity Achievement*, having made her commitments only after much exploration.

The Adolescent Coping Scale: Results

The Adolescent Coping Scale - short form (*ACS*, Frydenberg and Lewis, 1993, see appendix 3) was completed by 45 Asian young women (including those with identified special educational needs) and 23 non-Asian girls. During the study, nine Asian girls were unable to complete the *ACS* since they had to leave the session early to attend lessons. The *ACS* was given to nine 'extra' non-Asian girls, who volunteered to complete it after my lecture about working as an educational psychologist. Time did not allow for all students attending the lectures to complete the *ACS*.

Before presenting the *ACS* results, it is helpful to return to the authors' overview of the scale. The instrument was developed for use with young people in the age group 12 to 18 years. The authors' sample ($n = 643$) mostly comprised Australian-born students, with 27.2 % being born outside Australia in countries spanning all five continents. The age range of the sample was 15 to 18 years. The *Short Form* (18 items) of the *ACS* was developed from the *Long Form* (80 items) and is a useful indicator of coping styles when time is limited. There is a *Specific Form*, where the responses to a particular self-nominated concern are measured, and a *General Form*, where responses are used to measure how well an individual copes in general. The *Long Form* provides a conceptual framework of 18 coping strategies (Appendix 16), which are then used to form the basis of three scales in the *Short Form* which are: **Problem-focused**, **Reference to Others** and **Non-productive Coping**. Frydenberg and Lewis suggest that the three scales appear to discriminate quite satisfactorily and have

moderate reliability. The results may be used as indicators of coping style, but the authors suggest caution when using the *Short Form* since the styles concerned have not been fully researched.

Figures 8.2, 8.3, and 8.4 show a summary of results from the three sub-scales of the ACS (*Short Form - General*) used in the main study. The score profiles indicate the frequency of use of each of the coping styles. These were: *not used at all*; *used very little*; *used sometimes*; *used frequently*; and *used a great deal*. The scoring sheet (Appendix 17) enables the researcher to gain a profile of coping styles for each individual score.

Ethnic Group:	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Asian:	45	58.53	10.58	1.58
Non-Asian	23	57.13	11.42	2.38

t-Test for Equality of Means: Sig. (2-tailed): 0.626 (Not significant)

**Figure 8.2 Results of the Adolescent Coping Scale,
Sub-Scale: Solving the Problem**

Ethnic Group:	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Asian:	45	56.44	14.79	2.21
Non-Asian:	23	52.39	11.95	2.49

t-Test for Equality of Means: Sig. (2-tailed): 0.229 (Not significant)

**Figure 8.3 Results of the Adolescent Coping Scale,
Sub-Scale: Reference to Others**

Ethnic Group:	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Asian:	45	56.98	14.22	2.12
Non-Asian:	23	51.04	8.22	1.71

t-Test for Equality of Means: Sig. (2-tailed): **.033** (Significant)

Figure 8.4 Results of the Adolescent Coping Scale, Sub-Scale: Non-Productive Coping

The three coping styles of the *ACS* (**Solving the Problem, Reference to Others and Non-productive Coping**) were used *sometimes* by Asian and non-Asian young women.

There was a significant difference (0.033) between the groups in their use of the style: **Non-productive Coping**. Asian girls indicated that they use this style more often than non-Asian young women. There were no other significant differences between the two groups in their use of the styles: **Solving the Problem** or **Reference to Others**.

Appendix 18 presents further discussion of results, including internal reliability and score distribution.

These results do not reflect the findings of two other recent research projects that used the *ACS* (Sharma, 1999; Neill and Proeve, 2000), which found that south-east Asian adolescents reported greater use of the **Reference to Others** coping style, compared with indigenous teenagers from the UK (Sharma) and Australia (Neill and Proeve). Although the data in this study indicates that Asian girls use **Non-productive** strategies more often than their non-Asian peers, it does not follow that 'nothing productive' occurred. The young women may be

accommodating to the concern without bringing about a solution, which Frydenberg and Lewis (1993) suggest is one way to maintain equilibrium. For the Asian young women in the context of this study, **Non-productive Coping** may be their only realistic option. The final part of this chapter takes up the theoretical discussion.

Discussion

Frydenberg and Lewis (1993) define coping as

“A set of cognitive and affective actions which arise in response to a particular concern.” (Page 30)

They suggest that an individual's actions are an attempt either to restore equilibrium or to accommodate to the concern. For Asian young women at Piper College, it may be impossible to ‘restore the equilibrium or remove the turbulence’, since the girls inhabit two environments: home, with collectivistic values; and college, where individualism and independence are encouraged. The Asian girls lucidly voiced their feelings during the interviews and implied that the reconciliation of their two worlds is unlikely, if not impossible. If they attempt to solve the problem by asking for the help of their parents, they are likely to receive advice that is impossible for them to take, for example, to give priority to the *collectivistic* values of home; likewise, if they seek help from college staff, they may be in danger of being told to work towards goals of independence and *individualistic* success. Thus the guidance offered by home and college would be conflicting, and it may be difficult to conciliate between the ‘two worlds’ of home and college.

Folkman and Lazarus (1980) suggest that *problem-focused* coping necessitates the stressful situation to be changed in some way. Where a situation is assessed as unchangeable, *emotion-focused* strategies are more likely to be used. However, Lazarus' (1966, 1993) definition implies that coping is an attempt to deal with the problem rather than a ‘successfully completed’ act. It seems that if the Asian girls at Piper College are to cope with situations that might otherwise

be overwhelming, their only option is to perceive themselves as having some way of making a positive and *transactional* response to their environment. The data in this study indicated that Asian girls' greatest source of support came from sharing their anxieties with each other, since anyone outside their friendship groups has little chance of truly understanding their unique predicament; that is, Asian young women at Piper College make predominant use of *emotion-focused* coping strategies. Sayka explained,

"I wouldn't really talk to staff, no offence, but no-one would actually want to talk to staff... they're not going to know how you are feeling inside. We would prefer to talk to our friends".

Quahida responded,

"There are so many Asian girls that are in the same situation... it is alright because you have someone here who understands. We all just talk to each other. We are coming from the same roots so we know what goes on".

Lazarus and Folkman describe appraisal as an important stage in the coping process (Lazarus et al. 1980; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Folkman et al., 1986 (a); Folkman et al. 1986 (b)). When Asian girls ask themselves, 'What is at stake in terms of potential harm or benefit?' (*primary appraisal*), they have to take into consideration the responses and effects of two separate and often competing environments. When they ask, 'What can be done about the situation and what are the options and resources available?' (*secondary appraisal*), their options are limited to those that will ensure minimum conflict and turbulence in their day-to-day lives at home and college. It seems that the Asian young women made predominant use of Seiffge-Krenke's (1993) internal mode of coping by seeking social support offered by their friendship groups.

As the results of the Adolescent Coping Scale show, **Non-productive Coping** is used significantly more by Asian girls than non-Asian young women.

Frydenberg (1997) comments that this style reflects the use of,

"Non-productive avoidance strategies which are empirically associated with an inability to cope" (page 34).

As well as the more negative aspects of this coping style, such as, worry and self-blame, Frydenberg includes the strategies of: seek to belong, wishful thinking, ignore the problem, tension reduction and keep to self. These are the very strategies that the Asian girls were using to 'get by' and to 'stay afloat'. During the interviews, it became obvious that, where Asian girls only used negative and self-isolating strategies, they put themselves at some considerable risk of increasing their burdens. However, most Asian young women turned to each other for help and support.

In an effort to prevent conflict, Asian girls at Piper College indicated that they try to *compartmentalize* their lives. Other literature (Drury, 1991; Shaw, 1998; Ghuman, 1995; Breakwell, 1986) provides evidence of this approach. Ghuman (1999) mentions scenarios similar to those described by Asian girls in this study, where women 'learn to think and behave as obedient and respectful daughters... at home' and are 'engaging and assertive like their English peers' (page 47) when not at home. As Aysha said, when describing how she separates or *compartmentalizes* her life:

"When I come into college, the work is number one. When I get through that door (at home) ... I leave my college bag for a week. The atmosphere totally changes because there are always things at home that are more important... you drop everything".

The data also revealed evidence of *compromise change* (Wilson, 1978; Ghuman, 1994) where Asian young women try to do their best to fit in with both college and home, taking a bi-cultural approach. Safia explained,

"There are two different influences... home and outside... I was like... brought up in a different community... but I was immersed in white people. You start thinking like the people around you but you don't forget who you are... you learn to cope and deal with how to be around them".

Breakwell (1986) suggests a third mechanism, that of *fundamental change* whereby the identity structure is re-appraised, when all other attempts to reduce anxiety fail. Ghuman (1999) gives the example of Asian girls in the UK as they give up hope of a career and,

"are obliged to accept arranged marriages because of parental pressure... and seek self-esteem and distinctiveness in being a good wife and a mother... they sacrifice continuity of their ego-identity as it was expressed in their autonomy... prior to their marriage" (page 48).

There was little evidence from the data in this study that, where girls had decided to take on the traditions and values of their family, they felt they were making extreme sacrifices. Rather, it seemed they had weighed up the alternatives before making their choice. Rayla was fully prepared to enter an arranged marriage, so long as she was allowed to choose her husband. She knew the options open to those with Western values but chose to retain the cultural traditions of her family. Rayla commented,

“This is the way I am at home as well as college... you know this is what we can hold on to”.

One might argue that Rayla had been ‘brainwashed’ into accepting her parents’ values and that had she been given the chance, she would have made fundamental changes to her beliefs. However, the *emancipatory* approach of this study required Rayla’s comments to be not only listened to, but also believed. It is important to state that the girls interviewed at Piper College had clearly been allowed to choose to continue their education. It is unlikely that this study would have included the responses of those who had ‘given up hope’, and therefore made *fundamental changes* to their identity structure, since their presence at college indicated they had at least some degree of choice. Some girls were opposed to their parent’s values, for example, the idea of an arranged marriage, in which case they were contesting certain decisions and were determined to challenge parental pressure.

Stonequist’s (1937) concept of *marginal-man* was apparent in the case of Amina (case study one). As she tried to straddle her two lives she clearly felt marginalized by everyone. She described her feelings:

“It’s like I’m alone... now I do my own thing. It’s like they (family) don’t want to know me any more. I just like ... keep everything inside me. Like I’ve got a boyfriend (non-Asian, white) but things aren’t going right. I don’t tell him about it. I don’t really have a relationship... we can’t relate to each other very well. I’m just upset really.”

In Stonequist’s view, an individual’s conflict between two cultural systems may result in excessive anxiety and psychiatric instability. It is important to note that, in the study, Amina’s story was the only example of such an extreme and potentially damaging response.

Where the Asian girls indicated that they were coping adequately with stressors and daily hassles, it was clear that they were dealing with problems sequentially rather than simultaneously. This approach reflects Coleman's (1974) *focal model*. Other researchers (for example, Anwar, 1998; 1994; Drury, 1991; and Stopes-Roe and Cochrane, 1990) have found that, as they enter adulthood, Asian young people successfully negotiate problems of adjustment. This study replicated the findings of Ghuman (1997) in that many Asian girls spoke about concentrating on their careers and role in the home, preferring to defer possible confrontations with their parents about dating issues and arranged marriages until a later date.

The qualitative data from this study overwhelmingly suggests that Asian girls refer to each other as their main source of support. The interview data reflects the findings of two other recent research projects (Sharma, 1999; Neill and Proeve, 2000) which found south-east Asian adolescents to report greater use of the **Reference to Others** coping style, compared with indigenous teenagers from the UK (Sharma) and Australia (Neill and Proeve).

The coping behaviour of the Asian girls in this study usually appears invisible to others. Unlike the non-Asian girls, the Asian young women do not use overt, observable or active responses to stress, since such reactions could provoke parents and/or college staff, thereby increasing their anxieties. Sharma (1999) points out that the strategy of referring to close friends mirrors the *collectivistic* philosophies of the Asian community where the *bradari* or kinship group offers support to its members. In the same way, the more active coping strategy of trying to solve the problem reflects the Western, individualistic approach of energetic action and push for individual success. It also seems that the prevalent theories of coping stem from research undertaken from a Westernised viewpoint, in which 'dysfunctional' styles are those relating to the use of non-productive coping strategies (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1993). Except where dramatic crises arise, the Asian girls' *emotion-focused* coping strategies operate quietly, and are likely to be invisible to the uninformed observer in an FE setting.

CHAPTER NINE

Staff Perceptions of Asian Young Women's Experiences of Stress

Introduction

Chapter nine focuses upon staff's perceptions, and understanding, of stress as experienced by Asian young women at Piper College. The themes raised by staff had similarities to those presented by the Asian girls themselves. The teachers' views on the role of the Asian daughter and her relationships with her family are presented, as well as their thoughts about the impact of careers and marriage upon the girls' stress levels. Issues concerning the Asian community and media stereotypes are also discussed. Chapter nine moves on to present how teachers perceive the Asian girl's experience of college to be, and includes staff perceptions of cultural differences between staff and students, and the nature of Asian girls' relationships with their peers, and their tutors. The discussion turns to symptoms of stress that are displayed in college. Teachers' views on the experiences of girls with special educational needs are included in the data. Chapter nine then presents data from college retention records. Lastly, theoretical implications are considered, with reference to the analytical model.

The NVIVO computer software package (QSR, 1999) was again used in the data analysis. Figure 9.1 shows a graphic model of the themes that emerged from the interviews with college staff about their perceptions of Asian girls' experience of stress.

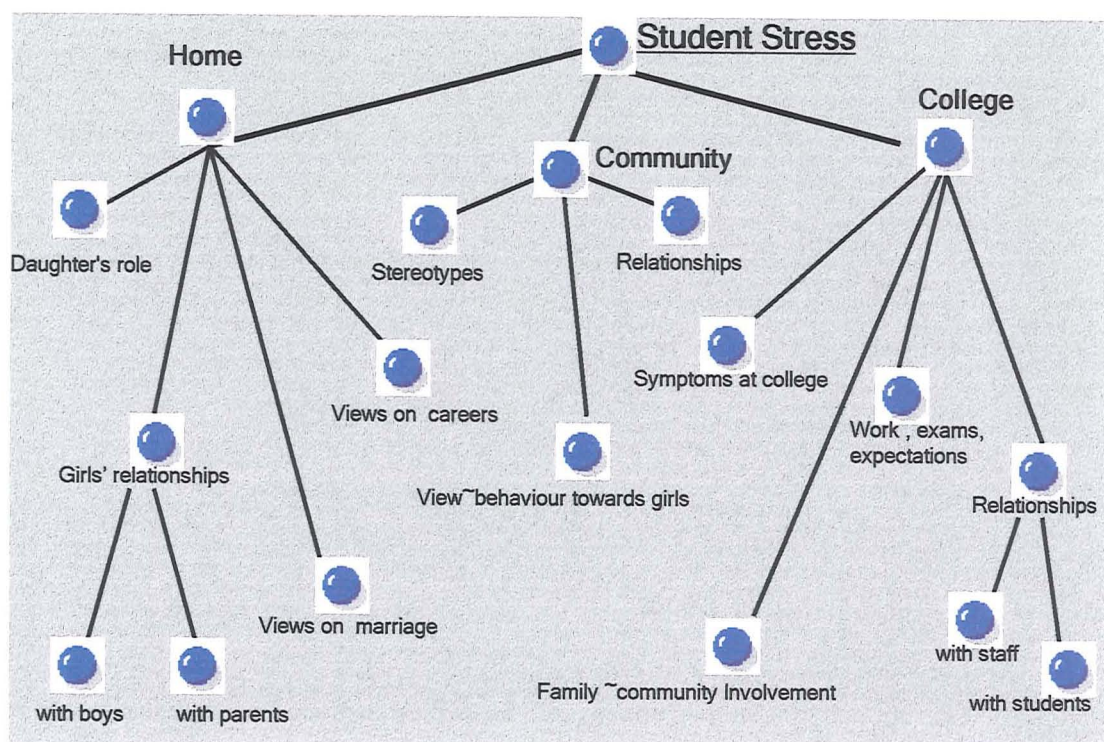


Figure 9.1 Graphic Model of Emergent Themes: Staff Perceptions of Stress as Experienced by Asian Girls

Sixteen members of staff were interviewed, among whom were representatives from across the management structure. Appendix 19 presents an outline of the management structure at Piper College and a list of those interviewed (all names have been changed), with their respective job descriptions. It is important to note that, since the staff volunteered to be interviewed, the broad spectrum of views held by staff at Piper College are not fully represented. That is, those involved in the study expressed an interest in the subject and may have been more aware of the issues involved.

At Home

The Daughter's Role

All the tutors interviewed raised the issue of the Asian girl's role at home. Most spoke about the responsibility of carrying out domestic chores, and listed cooking, cleaning, and looking after younger siblings and older brothers as being part of the daughter's role. Lisa (senior tutor and biology teacher) added that the girls' tasks increased around Eid, a Muslim holiday, when they would be expected to help cook and serve food to the extended family. She continued,

"When they get married and live with their husband's family they have to be skivvies for the rest of their lives ... and they know that. If there is a death in the family, and it needn't be a close relative, they are often expected to just drop everything and do what needs to be done and again do the cooking and entertaining."

Lisa went on to say that Asian girls had come to her, 'at their wits end', because they

"... don't have time to study, they don't get peace and quiet... because they are treated like drudges really, when they are at home."

Jean also spoke about the duties of the Asian girl at home. As the student administrator, Jean is based at the reception area in Piper College. It is here that she speaks to large numbers of students during the college day. Jean described her conversations with Asian girls as bringing 'quite an insight' into their home lives. She told of Rizwanna, who wished she could go home to 'a dinner on the table', instead of having to cook it. Rizwanna was 'expected to do it, to learn how to be a wife'.

Kish, an Asian male teacher (and vice-principal), spoke about the daughter's role as being 'serious' and a source of stress. However, he went on to say,

"They are expected to help their mums and the girls actually want to help their mums. It is not perceived as slavery... domestic slavery or something. They are stressed because what they are doing in terms of college, the expectation is that they have a lot of college work as well. You can see the two kind of interplay."

To Kish, anxiety, for the girls, stemmed from the pull between home and college, rather than from resentment about their role.

Caroline (senior tutor), saw the role of women generally as being central to the anxiety that many females experience. Caroline felt that, although Muslim girls often have 'rigid rules' to follow, the role of women pervades all aspects of society with the expectation being that

"We (women) will contribute in a fairly substantial and time consuming way to the day-to-day running of the house... it is kind of what you do... you live, you breath, you cook, you mop. The thing I would want to be clear about is that there is a pull in all directions for all women anyway."

Most tutors spoke about the difficult task, for Asian girls, of balancing home and college duties. All were aware that Asian women in particular had an important role in meeting the family's needs. However, Nasma (counsellor) felt that there was a 'great lack of understanding' about what the role of the Asian woman should be. Her work, as a counsellor for an Asian women's group, exposed her to the views of a large number of Asian girls, both at Piper College and in the local community. She felt that, rather than the Muslim religion being rigid, cultural taboos and practices passed on with family traditions have resulted in restrictions for Asian women.

Iqbal (male Asian teacher of English as a second language) had strong feelings about the role of Asian girls. He spoke about his sisters' difficult experiences, and his own need to leave the family home and find independence. Iqbal described the great emotional burden that Asian young women have to carry in ensuring that they maintain the family honour and care for the family. Iqbal described how he had observed girls bringing the emotional burden to college with them. He said,

" They come in tired from being a surrogate mum. If the mum has been very ill and the dad hasn't coped with the stress, the grief of it has all been passed to the daughter."

To Iqbal, the Asian daughter's role encompasses all aspects of her day-to-day life, both physical and emotional.

Iram (tutor for health and social care) also spoke from first hand experience, in that, as an Asian woman, she had made a choice to leave home and follow a career. She described the demeanour expected of an Asian girl:

“For an Asian woman to be loud is not acceptable. You are criticised if you are loud and express your feelings in an open way. You are supposed to be quiet, passive and timid when you are in groups. You are praised for that.”

Although Abdul (Asian male teacher of sociology) in essence agreed with Iram's sentiments, he gave additional insights into the role of the Asian daughter. He, too, spoke about the desire of the community and family for Asian girls to 'grow up to be good wives', with appropriate demeanours. However, he felt that some young women were able to use their role to their advantage by trying to be 'Daddy's little girl'. Abdul's view being that these girls could manipulate their parents, and especially their fathers, into seeing them as 'the best thing since sliced bread'. Abdul surmised that this position gives the girls some bargaining power when it comes to making requests.

Relationships with Parents

The topic of relationships with parents was raised by seven of the sixteen staff members interviewed. Most spoke about 'pressures from home' that mainly stemmed from fathers. Jean (student administrator) said that where there was a crisis in college, young women often referred to difficult relationships with their parents. Another tutor added that girls often feel that their mothers are unable to understand their experiences because

“They haven't been through the English educational system themselves.”

Iram (health and social care tutor) thought that girls would be more likely to speak to their parents about college issues but that talking to parents was

“in a lot of cases, like an alien area still.”

Ann (the support tutor, who several girls mentioned they confided in) spoke of the fear that parents could induce in their daughters when they tried to warn them

of apparent dangers outside the home. Ann recognised that parents were especially worried about their girls mixing with boys for the first time and explained,

“The families are more worried. They probably talk to their kids and that produces its own stress... they become more frightened.”

One Asian, male teacher felt that many ‘middle class’ Asian parents offer their children support with careers. He said,

“It is only the middle class Asians who achieve, but that is no surprise really because the support is at home. I don’t think the tutors always appreciate the kind of support some of the students might have at home.”

Kish (vice principle), spoke about the importance of trust between parents and daughters. He pointed out that where such positive relationships exist, there is less anxiety. Kish added,

“I don’t think it is anything to do with culture.”

Relationships with Boys

Nearly half of the tutors interviewed mentioned relationships with boys as being a source of stress for Asian girls. Iram (Asian female tutor) felt that a great deal of stress arose from the control that parents exerted over the day-to-day lives of the girls and their relationships with boys. She explained,

“They get picked up at the gates and some of their parents have their time-table, so they know exactly when they haven’t got lessons. There is one girl who is having problems because her dad ... well, thinks she has boyfriends and she hasn’t. I think managing it all can be stressful.”

According to Iram, many Asian young women carry a fear of being mistrusted or, worse, ‘found out’.

Several members of staff commented that the relationships of Asian young women are often closely monitored by brothers, male cousins and, on occasions, by other Asian girls in the community. Iqbal and Tom (head of faculty for learning support services) spoke about the ‘surveillance role’ carried out by

brothers and male cousins when the girls are outside the home, and their position of dominance in the family. Tom suggested 'there is quite clearly some kind of deference', for example, when brothers or male cousins attend 'parents' evenings' at Piper College, and then go home to 'tell them (the Asian girls) off or whatever'. Kish added that,

"The boys don't do anything like domestic work... it is a cultural thing."

Hilary (senior tutor) gave her view of cultural differences between parents, when it came to sexual relationships. She said,

"I think particularly Muslims do have this stricter idea of the interaction between the sexes. I think most non-Muslim families now are probably fully aware that their sons and daughters are possibly even sexually active at this age. I don't think the Muslim families want them to have thoughts about sex or indulging in it."

Hilary went on to say that, as a parent, she would expect her own daughter in late teenage years to be sexually active in a 'responsible manner'. In Hilary's view, Western and Asian parental views clash over the issue of sexual freedom for unmarried girls.

Marriage

During the course of the interviews, it became very apparent that the staff of Asian origin saw the issue of marriage as playing a crucial role in the lives of Asian young women. All five of the Asian tutors spoke at length about the topic, whereas only four of the eleven non-Asian teachers mentioned marriage as being a possible source of stress. It was also clear that the Asian teachers found it difficult to separate their personal circumstances from those of the students, since all referred to their own experiences.

As a teacher and a counsellor respectively, Iram and Yasmin had chosen to follow their careers rather than enter marriage, at this stage in their lives. Iram described her feelings about the issue:

“The arranged marriage is one big farce to me. It is passing me on from my father’s control to another man’s control. The vows that I take would be to honour my husband, not leave him... it is all about being passed around. I don’t want to be passed around. I am an individual; I have got feelings and emotions. I feel it would be destroying... more stressful than going away and having my own life.”

During the interview, which lasted nearly two hours, Iram told her own story.

She clearly had strong emotions about her choice to leave her family and follow a career, a choice that had been made with great difficulty. Iram continued,

“You either go with it or you totally say, ‘No’, and lead your own life and that might mean being seen as failing by your family.”

She went on to say how girls seem to pay little regard to how they are treated.

Iram told of how, on several occasions, she had spoken about forthcoming arranged marriages with students and gave an example of a girl she had found crying, because

“Every time she goes home her dad starts. She was to come straight out of college to get married. She feels maybe she should get married and at least not have the stress at home.”

Iram felt strongly that marriage is not ‘a way out’, since a girl may experience more stress if she ‘has a controlling husband’ who insists on a ‘traditional life’. She felt that, although the girls at Piper College were facing ‘the same issues’ as she herself had faced, they were not necessarily ready to challenge the family system and remained ‘quite passive’. Iram mentioned that some young women (who had ‘strong personalities’) were ‘quite good’, because they were adamant that they were not going to get married. She was aware of several girls facing difficult dilemmas, and knew that her own experience coloured the advice she gave.

Linda also raised the issue of control in the context of arranged marriage. In her capacity as curriculum manager for careers, Linda had often discussed plans for the future with Asian girls. In her view, the ‘pressure of marriage’ and question of ‘control’ arise where the ‘parents don’t like what the student is doing’ and the ‘marriage market is brought in’. Linda gave examples of students ‘disappearing’ for up to six weeks, whilst they are ‘put on show’ for a suitable husband. She explained,

“If nobody suitable turns up and if the parents are flexible enough we do sometimes see them back in college. One of the interesting responses is that we see it increases their determination to succeed and not get a husband.”

Yasmin (female Asian counsellor) picked up the theme of career versus marriage when she said,

“Life is very tough for an Asian woman because, unless she has the good fortune of finding the right career, the right man, life is a complete ordeal for her. If she is not doing too well at college, the parents will say, ‘OK, the only option for you is to get married’; so she may find herself forced into an arranged marriage. If you are not academically bright, the only other option open to you is to work a little bit to make some money and then be married... or you are straightaway taken back to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh or wherever.”

Yasmin continued,

“If ... god forbid ... the marriage fails then she is a big burden not only in her family but in the community... the whole thing becomes a big problem again.”

Iram thought that marriage might be used as a ‘ploy’ to stop the girls from following a career. Iqbal commented that many young women would have friends or relatives who had not been allowed to go to college at all.

Tom made reference to his own assumptions as a ‘white, middle-class teacher’, admitting that the arranged marriage is an ‘immense issue to get your head round’. He spoke about his assumption that most students go on to higher education or their chosen profession and how, when Asian girls ‘suddenly become wives’, the radical change in their lives is difficult to comprehend. Abdul, an Asian male teacher, was clearly very aware of family expectations for Asian girls. He said,

“I can’t stress as much or enough how much marital issues affect these girls. You know it’s such a big strain for them... and I’m speaking from experience.”

It seemed that, for non-Asian tutors, the whole landscape of arranged marriage could only be guessed at. It became apparent that all the Asian staff interviewed had strong feelings on the subject, yet the other teachers could only refer to

glimpses that they had had of the Asian girls' experience. Ann said that listening to the girls as they 'gossiped' about who was to marry who made her realise the huge issues that arose when a girl already had an illicit relationship with another boy.

Kish felt sympathy for Asian parents as they tried to secure the future for their daughters. He said,

"All parents are concerned about their children and are more concerned about their girls than boys. Traditional Asian parents are carrying a big burden. They have got to look after, nurture, support and keep her pure... keep her right... and to have all the right things so she can be married off to a respectable family. Then she can be a respectable mother".

In Kish's opinion, Asian young women rely on their parents to establish a future for them and whilst parents expect their daughters to maintain the family honour, girls expect their parents to realise their dreams. Iram felt that many Asian young women have idealised views as to what marriage entails, seeing just 'the glamour of it'. She explained that some girls think about their wedding day as a time when they are beautiful; they marry a 'lovely man'; and are able to have an intimate relationship with a man that is 'valid and not hidden'. Abdul put it,

"They still have a textbook image of a knight in shining armour coming to alleviate all their problems".

In contrast to the interviews with the girls themselves, positive aspects of the Asian marriage system were not mentioned.

Academic Achievement and Careers

Most of the staff interviewed (14) discussed the issue of Asian girls and their future careers. All teachers, including all five Asian members of staff, spoke about their perceptions of the apparent need for Asian children to choose 'high status' careers. The list of 'appropriate' careers included: medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, accountancy and law. Linda (curriculum manager for careers) put it:

“There are family aspirations and family pressures, certainly in subject selection ... the expectation that they will achieve and go into areas of study or careers that the family perceive as being high status within their own community.”

Nasma (student counsellor) spoke about the pressure placed upon girls to follow ‘respectable professions’ rather than ‘taboo’ subjects. In giving career advice, Linda said she realised that one ‘taboo’ subject was performing arts. Janice, a teacher of psychology, commented that her subject was perceived as ‘not proper’ because it does not ‘have a purpose’. Kish (vice principal), said that for his subject, geography, when recruiting for students, the college ‘struggles to get one class’, whereas classes for accounts are often over-subscribed and two or three classes are formed. Kish added,

“They may not even enjoy accounts or know what it is!”

He described how one student had assumed that, as an Asian male teacher, he would be teaching mathematics rather than geography.

Lisa (senior tutor) described one girl’s experience. Prabia had enrolled on GCSE courses for science and mathematics, because she had got poor grades when taking the examinations at school. Again she received low grades. After some discussion, the girl was enrolled on an art course since she had done well in this subject at school. Lisa asked, “Why on earth didn’t you do that last year... why did you do the sciences?” The girl replied that her father was insisting that she was going to be a doctor. Lisa went on to tell how Prabia’s father had been led to believe that she was continuing with the science subjects. Lisa had to explain to Prabia’s father that his daughter was not going to become a doctor. He was shocked that his wife and daughter had deceived him and, in conversation with Lisa, said,

‘She has wasted her time and I have wasted all these years in supporting her because she is... a waste of space’.

This story illustrates the enormous strength of emotion experienced by both the girl and her father. The expectations placed upon the young woman were all but impossible to meet, resulting in extreme anxiety and tension in the family. The girl and her mother had had to deceive her father over a long period of time. For the father, he had not been able to meet his goal of ensuring his daughter’s

success and, as a result, felt himself to be a failure. These tensions became apparent in college where Lisa had to walk a tightrope between meeting the needs of her student and respecting the wishes of the father. Prabia's story illustrates two key issues that face some Asian girls as they work towards a career. Firstly, whether their ability matches their subject choice and secondly, whether their choice of career is seen by their families as being approved of.

Many tutors spoke about Asian girls who had started courses with the 'bare minimum' entry requirements. As a result, they were seen to 'struggle and struggle'. Lisa explained that, as a senior tutor, she had met several girls who were floundering and had to tell them that a change of course rather than 'sheer hard work' was what was needed. Other tutors perceived some Asian girls to be very hard working as a way of offsetting their inability to achieve success.

Caroline (senior tutor) felt that the 'work ethic' stemmed from parents, who as first generation immigrants, had 'worked very, very hard', not always in 'middle class jobs'. These parents, it seemed, wanted their daughters to 'do better than they had'. Ann (learning support teacher) commented that many of the students (with special educational needs) that she supported, worked 'unbelievably hard' at A-levels when, realistically, they should 'think of something else ... a vocational course'. However, Ann added that some 'achieve quite well just from sheer hard work'. Lisa was aware of other female Asian students who had

"...very realistic views of what the world is like and how it will be for them. They actually make grounded, sensible decisions based on economic realities and their individual skills."

She went on to say how two Asian girls had flourished on vocational courses, having given up A-level subjects, and were now in line for a university place.

Ann and Linda discussed the issue of appropriate careers for Asian females. Ann explained how many of the girls she supported were not sure if they were to be allowed to work at all since, to their parents, 'non-academic' jobs were seen as demeaning. This was especially true of certain 'low status caring roles'. Ann said,

"They might think about a cleaner job, since parents would see it as an office job, but not caring for old people ... a messy job ... she shouldn't have to do it."

In Ann's view, many Asian girls were expected to assume the same role as their mothers. When giving careers advice, Linda had discovered that the health and social care courses were perceived as providing a good training for girls to 'learn how to be good mothers and carers', rather than as preparation for employment. Iram (tutor) felt that some parents do not 'really value education' nor support their daughters in pursuing a career, since marriage is seen as the priority.

Four of the five Asian members of staff and two other teachers raised the subject of the tension between careers and marriage. In their capacity as support teachers, Ann and Tom had listened to girls as they discussed their dilemmas and concerns. They described how some young women feared that they would be pressured into an arranged marriage if they did not succeed at achieving a respectable career or university place. Kish and Iram thought that academic failure inevitably meant that the girls were 'under pressure for marriage'. Iram added that she felt that some girls used attendance at college as a way of delaying marriage. Tom described how he had witnessed a few Asian girls who had gained excellent results, but who were 'drawn out very rapidly' to get married.

Abdul (teacher of sociology) said,

"They (parents) don't really want to encourage their girls to study long. I mean some allow degree-level work to be done until about the age of 21 or 22. After that, it is seen as a problem if you can't marry your daughter off."

Abdul felt that many Asian parents worry, not only about ensuring a good marriage for their daughters, but also about the affects that university might have on them. He explained,

"If the daughter is subjected to too much... you know... freedom of thinking and freedom of speech at university level, then they are afraid they're going to change beyond recognition and the culture... the culture leaves them and they adopt a new one. Their identity no doubt changes."

Kish also mentioned this aspect of parental concern, adding that some parents will 'restrict their choice of university', thereby ensuring that their daughters live at home. Linda's career records showed that '93 percent of Asian university students stay in the London area'.

Caroline thought that many Asian young women are aware of their parents' concerns about their careers and that they themselves want to 'fit in' because

"They want the respect and the niche in society and the love and support of their parents... but they are very torn."

This view echoes the theme of family '*izzat*' and honour that arose in the girls' discussions. The staff interviews revealed that many of the tutors are aware of the anxiety and stress that some Asian young women suffer because of not wanting to 'let their parents down'.

The Asian Community

The Community Response to Asian Girls

Most of the comments about the community's response to Asian young women came from the five Asian staff members. Three other teachers briefly referred to the influence that the Asian community has on the girls. Once again, the topics of marriage and careers were raised. Nasma (students' counsellor) spoke about the importance of reputation within the Asian community. She said,

"To leave your home, unless it is legitimate ... to go to university or a career that takes you somewhere ... it is absolutely suicidal. From your own personal survival point of view... the community will never forget. You may never be able to enter the community again. Some of the women I work with who live in the refuges are very isolated individuals. They have lost their entry into a proper community system. The minute anyone finds out they have run away from home and are living in refuges, nobody will want to know them."

Nasma went on to tell of how one young woman had tried to befriend another Asian girl who was living at home. However, this was not allowed to continue once her friend's parents found out that she was living in a refuge. Nasma explained that this young woman would be likely to face enormous difficulties and 'immense stress', since she would be viewed as 'not having behaved herself'

and, therefore, 'not worth marrying'. In Nasma's view, girls who have 'run away from home' carry the 'biggest stigma in the Asian community'.

Abdul described the Asian community as 'protective over their own', especially when it comes to their women, almost as if the community 'owns' the girls. He went on to say,

"The women are regarded, not so much the jewel in the crown, but definitely something you need to look after. The girls are under the sort of stress where they are trying to live up to certain expectations but they don't really know what that expectation is. They have Western images of Asian women being chained to the kitchen sink, not getting out and being oppressed. They find that the community looks down on them and you know, the community does watch ... big brother does watch as well."

Abdul explained that within Asian culture there is a 'ripple effect' where

"If you do something bad it has an effect on those around you... your family ... and maybe the wider community... you are in a minefield."

Linda's discussions with students about their careers had given her some insight into the 'ripple effect'. She said that family expectations and the notion of 'what is acceptable within and good for the community' plays a large part in the decision-making process.

Iram spoke at length about her own experiences within the community and the pressure to conform, and said she found community interference 'so offensive'. She felt that, if only her mother 'could blank out everybody', the pressure would ease considerably. Iram added that when she has expressed her views to Asian female students, they probably think of her as 'satanic'. Iram felt strongly that Asian girls should have the right to be individualistic and make decisions without the consent of the family and community.

Most of the staff who spoke on this subject raised the issue of the 'watchers who gossip'. As Sue put it, 'everyone knows everyone', and there are fears that the girls' behaviour is constantly under surveillance from other Asian community members. Three teachers told of how anonymous calls had been made to parents to inform them of their daughter's misdemeanours. Jean explained,

"It seems to me if somebody wants to get their own back on a girl, they will phone her home and say, 'she is not in college' or 'she has a

boyfriend'. Then the parents arrive here and ask me about it... that happens quite a lot."

The girls' behaviour and their relationships within college are relayed to the home and community. Also, occurrences in the Asian community may have ramifications within college. As vice principal, with responsibility for pastoral care and community links, Beth was aware that students in college represented 'gangs' that existed within the Asian community. On occasions, Asian young women would look to their brothers or cousins for protection if there were difficult incidents at college. Jean (student administrator), was also aware of family 'fallouts' that were continued in the college environment.

Three teachers commented on the importance of unity and cohesion within the Asian community and how that translated into a sense of safety for many Asian young women. Abdul put it,

"The most amazing thing about Asian culture is that the nuclear, extended family is so tight and strong with girls, they actually like it a lot. They like the feel of the family."

Other teachers viewed the 'tight and strong' family as a source of pressure for Asian girls, resulting in a sense that they are somehow imprisoned. Nasma felt that the Western media often ignores positive features of Asian culture, and articles often focus upon oppressed Asian women. In Iqbal's view, even where Asian culture is viewed in a positive way, there is often stereotyping. He explained,

"There is the stereotype of: all Asians do well in school. In fact, Asian children who have come from very poor backgrounds in the inner city don't achieve at all. It is the middle class Asians who achieve... they have the support at home".

The non-Asian staff seemed to be very aware of difficulties, stemming from the community, that Asian young women at Piper College have to face, even if they were unable to fully comprehend the effects. However, the Asian tutors spoke with great emotion, strength of feeling and insight when discussing how they observe Asian girls trying to bridge the gap between the culture of their community and home and that of the Western society. The interview data

demonstrated complexities of Asian community culture that go beyond the simplistic stereotype that is often presented by Western media.

At College

Work Load, Examinations and Expectations

Eight of the teachers interviewed raised issues around work, examinations and expectations in relation to Asian girls. Their comments indicated contrasting perceptions.

Janice, a non-Asian female tutor, felt that some Asian girls had become anxious because their parents had not allowed them to follow their chosen course. She explained that, if their parents then change their minds and the young women switch subjects, they find it difficult to catch up with the work. Lisa mentioned that, in some cases, an Asian girl's ability had not been appropriately matched to the course and when she had been persuaded to move from academic courses to vocational courses, she had enjoyed great success. In Janice's view:

“Asian girls get on to it, they really do try very hard. I think with Asian girls you don't tend to get mediocrity, you tend to get them doing really badly, or doing really quite well. If they fall into the C band (less able) they give up and it is very hard to get them going... or I think they have their goals too high.”

In Janice's opinion, Asian girls become stressed because of inability to achieve the goals set for them. Lisa and Janice seemed to hold fixed views about Asian young women's work in college. However, Beth (vice-principal) said that, as she reviewed student progress and attitude to work, she had not noticed any real differences between Asian and non-Asian girls.

Iqbal (learning support teacher) commented that he had observed Asian girls making an effort to 'have a good time' rather than work hard whilst at college. He explained:

"I think they are under pressure... sort of ... if you don't have a store of fun memories, you are going to have to settle down. I think it is always at the back of their mind. They find it impossible to address their studies because it always seems to be about boys, boys, boys. I think it is probably a reaction to pressure."

It seemed, to Iqbal, that the young women make the most of their freedom since, although college is away from the home and community, most Asian parents view further education as a positive and respectable environment for their daughters. Iram (course tutor) agreed with Iqbal when she said,

"They have got so many other things they want to do here... like go and talk to the boys in the refectory... because they are not usually allowed to socialise with men at all. They get picked up at the gate and some of their parents have their timetable, so they go home and that is it."

Some girls seem to regard college as a 'safe haven' in which to explore their independence and socialise with boys, with work taking second place.

Ann spoke about the stress that some girls experience when they move from single sex schools to the mixed gender setting of college. She also spoke about the Westernised content of some courses such as health and social care:

"They have to do little role plays about stereotypes and it is so pertinent to them. It is quite hard for them. They know how to answer the questions to pass exams. They know they are supposed to say, 'women can do male roles'. They know the answer but it is not what happens to them."

Iram (course tutor) mentioned how some Asian girls have significant difficulties in adapting to the use of the English language. This is especially so where they learned their basic literacy skills in their home language, in Pakistan, Bangladesh or India. Janice mentioned the stress experienced when the young women pay long visits to the country of their parents' origin, since they have heavy workloads upon their return to the UK. Sue (chemistry course tutor) explained that she often expects her students to use the local library in order to research topics. She felt that some Asian girls are unable to get parental permission to make the required visits.

Relationships

When it came to discussing student relationships in college, the support staff and members of the pastoral team were very aware of the stress created when girls knew they were under surveillance from other students. Ann put it,

“They are frightened. An awful lot of girls have cousins or brothers and they feel they are being watched.”

Ann went on to echo Jean’s point that parents frequently telephone the college in order to establish if allegations made in anonymous calls or letters are true. Beth gave examples of supposedly unacceptable behaviour:

“The girls may have been seen giggling a lot or talking to boys.”

Ann said that one girl had been seen wearing trousers and a shirt, rather than the traditional shelwar kameez, and had cut her hair short. The young woman’s father came to collect her from college and soon after she left the course. Ann had not heard of her whereabouts since. Ann went on to explain that many young women view the so-called ‘prank calls’ as ‘a kind of revenge thing’ and added that they cause a great deal of distress. Potentially, such calls could ruin a girl’s reputation within the Asian community. Beth told the story of where ‘wild’ accusations about a particular Asian girl were written on toilet walls. The girl’s brothers had tried to identify the perpetrators through a series of telephone calls to cousins. The network of Asian ‘gangs’ outside Piper College became involved, resulting in the young woman being involved in a violent incident. Beth described her feelings:

“Often they are behaving in a way that you or I would think was quite normal but it isn’t something that is expected (of Asian girls)”.

The teachers’ perceptions that the behaviour is ‘quite normal’ can make the situation more stressful for the girls. Tutors ask to see parents on a routine basis to discuss progress and especially if there are any concerns about behaviour. Kish (vice-principal) told of how he had planned to discuss a water fight with the parents of two Asian girls. They had begged him not to do so, since they were fearful their parents might terminate their college placement.

Three teachers suggested that Asian girls might be anxious about non-Asian tutors' apparent lack of understanding about their home culture and day-to-day lives, which could produce insensitive responses when the girls experience difficulties. Iqbal gave an example:

"I don't think staff realise how many go home and only speak their native language. It is a sort of mis-match... they don't quite understand what happens when they (Asian students) leave college and what the background is."

Ann also raised this issue. During the interviews with the Asian young women, many had said that Ann had provided the greatest source of support and understanding. Yet, Ann was clearly aware of the cultural divide when she said,

"I feel rather depressed. I think it is difficult for us to appreciate their lives. You can hear what they say and be sympathetic, especially when they are talking about their parents... when you are a parent yourself. You can't actually think about it, it is too enormous, about how their lives actually might be... and all the sort of things drummed into us, like how we are desperate not to treat our boys and girls differently; favour one over the other. They have been brought up in a different culture within the same streets as us. It is quite big."

In contrast, Janice, a subject tutor, said that she had not experienced any 'major problems just because they (the girls) are Asian', although she mentioned that they 'don't like it very much' if their names are not pronounced correctly. Hilary, a senior tutor, related an incident that had occurred between herself and a devout Muslim young woman. The Asian girl, who was studying childcare, had been asked by Hilary not to wear her *hijab* (veil) and long, black ankle-length dress since Hilary felt there were health and safety issues when working with children. The girl officially complained about Hilary's response to her attire. Clearly, the heated exchanges that had taken place had created stress not only for the young woman but also for Hilary. Hilary expressed her feelings:

"She has her full face showing but the long baggy thing, it is ... well. She seemed to suggest that I was insulting her religion. In fact she was being fairly fundamentalist. I would be inclined to use that term but one has to be a bit careful. I suspect she was being fairly dictatorial about what people should and shouldn't do if they were practising."

Hilary felt that the young women should make every effort to take on Western ways where there were issues of 'health and safety'. Presumably, most young women in South Asia complete childcare training in traditional clothing. It

seemed that notions as to what is acceptable and 'safe' are subject to cultural differences.

Lynn, the college educational psychologist, noted an apparent lack of understanding of important aspects of Asian culture on the part of one staff member. An Asian girl had been referred to Lynn owing to concerns about her work. Lynn explained what happened when a memo was sent to staff:

"One of the tutors said, 'in order to pass the leisure and tourism course the girl must be allowed to go out. She must be allowed to watch TV, go out on college trips to the cinema.'"

Lynn realised that a lot of the staff did not appreciate how difficult such course requirements might be for some Asian girls. She added,

"I know what it is like, you don't have the time... it is so much about results".

Thus, the college system itself and the staff supporting the system could potentially be putting enormous pressure upon students to conform to Western values. Although some teachers were aware of these difficulties, others were not.

The staff's responses suggest a deep awareness of cultural differences even though those differences may not be fully understood, especially where close student-staff relationships have developed. However, there are teachers who are seemingly unaware of any tensions between Asian and Western cultures in the college context, and there are those who feel that it is the student's place to fit in with college systems and requirements. It is important to remember that staff volunteered for interview, which implies that they had an interest in the subject under research. The rest of the staff, numbering approximately 100, may have had many reasons for not taking part in the project, including a lack of time. It might possibly have been because they did not perceive there to be an issue.

Signs and Symptoms of Stress in College

Central to this study was the question of 'invisibility' of Asian girls' needs in Piper College. During their interviews teachers were asked how they might know if Asian young women were stressed or anxious and what symptoms, if any, they would look out for.

Many teachers spoke about Asian girls having a 'tendency to secrecy' and 'bottling it up'. Several teachers, both Asian and non-Asian, stated that they thought Asian girls were 'particularly quiet', that they 'wouldn't say' about their anxieties because they 'tend to not to want to cause problems'. Janice, a subject teacher, admitted that it is 'so hard to pick up' on difficulties. However, Ann and Iram, who had been named by girls as teachers they could talk to in an emergency, described the signs of anxiety they looked for. The girls might be 'totally miserable, sad or quiet'; 'weepy, tearful, withdrawn'; 'looking very sad'; 'not contributing to work in the classroom'; and 'phased out'. Sue (a subject tutor) said,

"You can tell from their face... their faces give it away. Often they just look very tired. Once you know the kids ... you know. Sometimes I have a word with them. Sometimes they chat more or they are withdrawn. Withdrawn is probably more common."

The chances of staff being sensitive to these signs of stress seem to depend upon the degree to which staff are aware of the girls' emotional states. Such symptoms are likely to be subtle and all but the most perceptive of staff could easily miss or disregard them.

Most of the teachers described the more obvious signs that indicate if a student is in difficulty. These included: 'irregular attendance'; 'just not handing work in'; 'poor standards of work'; 'avoiding staff'; 'a disproportionate number of illnesses'; and 'long periods of absence'. The chances of Asian girls being given support and understanding from staff seems to be ad hoc and dependent upon who their tutors are. Janice, a subject teacher, described her own difficulties in trying to ascertain if an Asian girl was under stress:

“I don’t know, they always look so nice to me, apart from the few that dress in black all the time... their clothes ... so sometimes when they look a bit tacky... when they haven’t gone to so much care as usual. I don’t really know, sometimes you miss it totally.”

It seems that Janice relies on visual clues based upon her notions of outward appearance. Hilary, senior tutor, said that she would look for changes in behaviour that might include, in some cases, ‘more erratic or assertive behaviour’, or even an improvement in work. Another senior tutor, Lisa, also mentioned that she had observed Asian girls becoming more assertive when they were experiencing difficulties. Iqbal said,

“They might be unusually open or very, very closed... in odd ways.”

Iqbal went on to say that the girls often ask about his own Asian background and when he discusses such topics as arranged marriage and families:

“The girls’ response tends to tell me a lot”.

Iqbal added,

“I have never really come across a student that has said quite early on that things are difficult. It always seems to take ages to get to the bottom of it. Initially the absence is illness ... and by the time it gets to the stage they are not really attending any lessons... they are falling apart ... and then they will talk.”

Many staff members felt that, when Asian young women are experiencing extreme stress and anxiety, they would be unlikely to discuss their worries with tutors. The teachers presented several examples of how a ‘crisis’ would have to occur in order for the girls’ difficulties to be noticed. In his capacity as head of faculty for learning and support services, Tom was keenly aware of such crises. He explained:

“Probably a lot of girls would start off by talking amongst their own confidantes until the difficulties they are experiencing become so intense that they actually start becoming mentally ill, neurotic, anxious or depressed... then they get picked up.”

Beth, vice principal for pastoral care, agreed with him and gave anecdotal evidence of when Asian girls had experienced panic attacks, started to hyperventilate or faint. As student administrator, Jean was often the first person to be called to administer first-aid. She described the situation:

“I am often called to a crisis where they are hyperventilating, usually in the common areas like a corridor. Sometimes we can get it three days running. I always encourage them to carry a brown paper bag with them and I am called when they need backup. But it can get to the point where you think, ‘here we go again! They get a lot of attention from their friends... quite a crowd. ”

Jean commented that the girls rarely experienced such symptoms in class. It seems that the young women did not welcome attention from the teaching staff but were glad of the support of friends and from Jean who, as an administrator, did not represent authority. Jean went on to describe cases of Asian young women who, more worryingly, had taken drug overdoses. She spoke of three occurring during one college year.

Beth discussed how crisis management often occurred in college. She recalled four suicide attempts during the previous year, where Asian young women had been taken to hospital by ambulance. Both Beth and Jean spoke about Safia who had been referred to me in my capacity as educational psychologist, two years before. Safia had experienced many panic attacks in college where she appeared to lose consciousness. She had been referred, via the emergency services, for neurological checks. Despite numerous scans and physical examinations by specialist doctors, no physiological cause for the attacks was found. It later transpired that, when Safia was 12 years old, a cousin had subjected her to sexual abuse during a visit to Pakistan. Four years on, her family had arranged for her to marry the same cousin, unless she passed her A ‘levels and followed a high status profession. Safia passed her course and left the college. As the current educational psychologist, Lynn spoke of receiving similar ‘crisis’ referrals, for example, of Asian girls who were suffering from ‘impaired vision, having blackouts, struggling with their work and being very depressed’.

College records indicated that, during a six-month period, fourteen incidents had been recorded where a member of the administration staff, with first aid training, had been called to help students. Twelve of the fourteen students were Asian girls. The first aid record indicates: 5 cases of ‘hyperventilation’; 1 of ‘hysterical collapse’; 1 of ‘migraine’; 2 cases of ‘abdomen pains’; and 3 cases of ‘dizziness’.

Tutors were not called to these incidents and the staff as a whole were not generally informed if girls had been unwell.

During the staff interviews, it became clear that Asian girls' symptoms of stress went unnoticed if they were not sufficiently dramatic, or unless the more sensitive staff were able to recognise subtle signs. When symptoms are displayed in a dramatic and serious way and when a 'crisis' occurs, for example a drug overdose, a young woman would be supported by the pastoral care system. However, where the symptoms are less overt and connected to quality or output of work, the student would be more likely to receive disciplinary action. Beth was aware that many tutors recognise 'work-related' difficulties yet, she commented, students might be asked to leave a course if the required level or standard of work was not attained. Hilary described one such student:

"She has a complicated background with some sort of abuse. She is being supported by the Asian counselling service. She is a completely useless student in that she is never here when she should be, is always late and then tells me one thing and does another. I am probably going to have to get rid of her. She won't do what I tell her she has got to do... which is basically attend lessons and keep us informed of absences. I am sure that there is so much going on in her life that she doesn't feel that what I ask is reasonable... but I can't ask for less in a sense... to support her on a course."

Hilary was aware of the girl's difficult situation and yet her role as course tutor meant that she had to ensure that basic course requirements were met. Successful course completion clearly had priority over the emotional well-being of the girl. For Hilary the college system was forcing her into an uncomfortable position.

College Retention Records

Whilst the interviews with staff gave a greater depth of understanding, information from college retention records added to the data. Beth, deputy director, had kept careful records on students leaving college before completing

their courses (Figure 9.2) and, where possible, she had interviewed students about why they were leaving (Figure 9.3).

	Number of Students Enrolled	Number of Leavers	% Number of all Student Leavers
Asian Girls	261	24	9%
Non-Asian Girls	335	41	12%

Figure 9.2 Female students leaving courses before completion: Piper College 1997

	Within College	Employment & Training	Personal	Unknown
Asian Girls	25%	12%	46%	25%
Non-Asian Girls	34%	26%	34%	6%

Figure 9.3 Reasons given for leaving courses before completion: Piper College 1997

The explanation for the headings in figure 9.3 are as follows: *Within College* – poor attendance, course failed or terminated by college staff; *Employment and Training* – training or education taken up elsewhere; *Personal* – moved house, married, became ill, travel, family commitments; *Unknown* – no reason given for leaving, student left college without informing staff.

The total number of leavers of both sexes in 1977 was 129. The records indicate that 9% of the 129 were Asian girls and 12% were non-Asian young women.

The overall retention rate for all students (n=1406) was 91%. Beth's interview records showed that Asian girls were leaving college for different reasons to non-Asian girls. 60% of non-Asian girls left college due to *within college* factors or to follow *employment and training* elsewhere, whereas 71% of Asian young women left their courses for *personal* or *unknown* reasons. Beth explained that *unknown* usually meant that students left without notifying the college. Of most interest were the notes taken during the 'leaving interview'. The following extract (figure 9.4) shows the first ten recorded responses given by Asian young women who left college for *personal* reasons.

- Domestic responsibilities
- Seeking medical help for depression
- Not coping; no response to letters home
- Letters home – no reply; sister said she has left
- Psychological and domestic problems
- Tensions in family; family members ill
- Living in safe housing; personal difficulties
- Getting married
- Family going to Pakistan
- Left home, living in a hostel

Figure 9.4 Asian Girls' Personal Reasons for Leaving Piper College, 1997 (first 10 extracts)

The reasons given for leaving college reflect the 'stress' themes that arose from the staff and student interviews, for example, depression, family tensions, and marriage. The responses outlined in Figure 9.4 seem to indicate the serious nature of the girls' difficulties.

Discussion

Generally, tutors' perceptions seemed to be more pessimistic than those of the girls themselves. They expressed their concerns about Asian young women appearing to be caught between the two worlds of home and college. Nasma, a counsellor, expressed it,

"I think the main problem is trying to reconcile the two lives that these young women lead. You know it is really quite amazing that a huge population of young Asians have found a niche outside home. You know, almost a secret life... and they've got another life at home, which is about being obedient to your parents, totally obedient. When they come here there is a lot more free time and a lot of them find it extremely difficult to handle."

Staff comments about 'two lives' indicated that they perceived most Asian girls to have Marcia's (1994) identity status of either *diffusion* (lack of commitment) or *moratorium* (identity crisis). Abdul, a male subject teacher, commented,

"There are certain discrepancies between what they are told by their parents and what they really want to do. As a result some of them go into a shell and start cocooning themselves in their own thoughts which leads to stress and that's basically an identity clash."

Abdul added that he thought it was hard for the college pastoral system to 'pick up on' such problems, 'let alone cope with them'. Iram, a female Asian tutor, felt that many girls did not know what to do since they could not decide 'what is right or wrong', the residual feeling being one of ever-present, immense guilt. Iram spoke of her own distressing experiences when she went through 'an identity crisis', not knowing if she was Westernised or Asian. Kish, a male Asian director, said he was aware that the dual role of Asian girls must create 'a certain inner tension'. Ann felt that the arena of conflict was centred 'in their minds'. Abdul also thought that stress for Asian young women comes as a result of trying to 'battle the conscience', unable to commit themselves to values or beliefs.

There was no evidence of staff members perceiving Asian girls to have made commitments to issues and reached the status of *identity achievement*. However, in Iqbal's view, Asian girls who held on to their parent's beliefs, as in *foreclosure*, seemed to 'find it easier to cope'. He explained,

“If they have been brought up in Pakistan or India or wherever, they cope with parental rules about what they should or shouldn’t do in terms of how to respond to other cultures... because they haven’t had this schizophrenic upbringing.”

Iqbal’s comments echo the views of some of the young women in the study who held similar beliefs to their parents and seemingly experienced few tensions.

Tom (head of learning support) had also observed that Asian girls who seemed to embrace fundamentalist Muslim views, for example by wearing a *hijab* or veil, seemed to be more confident and self-assured. He noted that some clearly made a conscious decision to follow the belief system of their parents, having not done so previously. Tom commented,

“Girls suddenly arrive in *hijab* and all the Muslim trappings of Islam, who have not shown any inclination to be heading in that direction. I get the feeling that some of them embrace that as a kind of political statement, rather than because of parental pressure. I think it is self-motivated. It is because of a fear, not a wholesale rejection of Western society and its predominant values, because they can’t embrace that (Western society) fully. They are not allowed to embrace that fully and they get their own dynamic or their own kind of empowerment by going for something really alternative. It protects them and brings its own passion.”

In Tom’s view, the young women had thought about the issues and had decided to adopt parental values. In Marcia’s terms, these girls were moving towards *identity achievement*, rather than *foreclosure*, since commitments were being made after an exploration of issues. Of course, it is impossible to be certain about the inner psychological life of any of the young women in the study, but it would seem that where girls choose to reject Western values they are not simply giving in to parental pressure for them to maintain traditional values and beliefs. Abdul described his view of the formation of identity for many Asian girls:

“It will take place internally ... there will be no battles taking place, just a process, a phase... but it will be expressed externally and the community will notice.”

All staff interviewed were aware of the anxieties that came from *barriers* - ‘external influences which affect and possibly limit individual developmental options’ - (Yoder, 2000, page 95) arising from home and college. Many teachers were worried that Asian girls experienced a lack of freedom and opportunities to

make personal choices. It was apparent that Asian teachers were more acutely aware of the emotional difficulties that Asian young women might experience. Abdul spoke about the strains and tensions within the Asian community. He explained,

“Second generation immigrants find British culture more enticing than their own. That is where the problem lies. There is no doubt it is more enticing simply because it’s liberal. It’s do as you please, do as you want, whereas in Asian culture there is a ripple effect. If you do something bad it has an effect on those around you.”

Thus, the perceived liberalism of Western society causes Asian parents to protect their daughters and, in some instances, young women’s options are reduced. Abdul described it as a ‘minefield’, yet he also spoke about the positive aspects of a collectivistic environment, and confirmed the views held by many of the young women interviewed, when he said,

“The most amazing thing about Asian culture is that the actual nuclear and extended family network is so tight and so strong with girls, that they actually like it a lot. They like that feel of a family”.

Thus, even where opportunity for choice is limited by the Asian family and community, and where girls have little control over their circumstances it is not always viewed negatively. Caroline, a senior tutor, made every effort to understand the complexities of the collectivistic Asian community. She said,

“In a world where society is integrated, communities matter. If people are frightened and living in fear, they are not very flexible. Immigrants are often living in fear and are not flexible but what matters is ... how they are seen within their own community. It matters an awful lot... and although communities generate these problems, they also have the solution.”

All five Asian tutors spoke of the differences between the collectivistic world of the Asian home and community and the individualistic environment of college. The non-Asian staff members recognised the Asian girls’ struggle to achieve a bi-cultural identity, and two white female teachers spoke of their difficulty in fully comprehending the complexities of Asian cultural values. Some tutors were aware of how the Western college setting might ‘limit individual developmental options’ and create additional stress for Asian girls. At first glimpse, the freedom of the individualistic environment of college may not seem to be a *barrier* yet, when an Asian girl chooses to immerse herself in Western concepts of

individuality and independence, she is in danger of losing the developmental options offered in the protection of her home and community. Caroline showed some understanding when she commented,

“It is a huge decision. There are still young women who run away from home. It means going off completely and negating everything that you hold dear... to do this mad thing.”

Abdul was very aware that many Asian young women are attracted to an individualistic culture. He said,

“Feminism has spread to Asian girls. They want empowerment and independence.”

Iram, an Asian tutor, reflected upon her own experiences as she described her own ‘crisis’:

“I turned ‘round and thought, ‘You let me! Education is my right. Why should I be denied that right?’ I have grown stronger; I feel I can’t be a part of that anymore because I have moved on. My independence, my strength, everything that I am today is because I have worked for it.”

Iram felt strongly that Asian young women should ‘fight’ for their rights for independence and made it clear that she would support girls in the process.

The discussion here reflects the process by which immigrants adopt the way of life of their host society, that is, the process of *acculturation* (Berry, 1994). It is about whether individuals make minimum adjustment to their Asian lifestyles (*accommodation*) or are completely absorbed into Western society (*assimilation*), or assume a hybrid or bi-cultural identity, somewhere between the two. However, Ghuman (1999) points out that this model underplays the significance of the receiving society and the response it makes towards the immigrant.

Two tutors offered contrasting views about *acculturation*. Hilary, senior tutor, voiced her thoughts:

“I have a dilemma. I have lived and worked abroad and have an insight that some people don’t have but I feel that they (immigrants) should be allowed their culture within our culture. It is our culture; they come to live in it. Although we are a multi-cultural society we do hold certain

things as being British values. There is a danger that we are backing away from those ... and we are becoming little mini Muslim states. I don't think that is how it should be. . I am all for living with others but I don't see why I should keep being the one who compromises all the time."

It seems that Hilary felt that those from other cultures should somehow 'try to fit in' with Western society. Indeed, she had demonstrated this view when she voiced her concerns about the Asian girl wearing a *hijab*, or veil, and a traditional, long dress to childcare sessions. Abdul made specific reference to *assimilation* and said,

"I don't want to be a prophet of doom and gloom but assimilation... assimilation is a bad word to use but I think the next generation of Asian children... it will resemble nothing. They (children) are taking on the norms of British, Western society so there won't be much of a problem. You can see signs of it. They (children) are more Western than they are Asian. As popular culture lets in more aspects of Asian culture we like it more, we feel we belong... reconciled... comforted. There will be no battles taking place."

Abdul went on to explain how, in his view, many Asians felt their culture to be 'pillaged' and 'abused' by Westerners, for example, in their use of Indian fashion and music. He went on,

"So there's another new can of worms. Are they abusing us or are they accepting us? Where's the psyche telling you this is a raping of our culture? This is actually celebrating the best parts of our culture!"

Thus, one tutor felt that Asian students should fit in with Western societal practises, whereas another saw his Asian culture fast disappearing into assimilation. Abdul felt that many Asian practises and traditions should be celebrated and shared in Western society, to protect them from extinction and to enrich the host culture. In these instances, the dilemma of Asian young women at Piper College would be: to endeavour to 'fit in' and not expect a Westerner to 'compromise', or to cultivate and share the positive aspects of their 'Asian-ness' with those around them.

The very fact that the staff volunteered to be interviewed, suggests that they were at least cognizant of possible stressors for Asian young women at Piper College. All staff demonstrated awareness that Asian girls face complex interpersonal issues and that many are endeavouring to achieve an ethnic identity in a bi-cultural setting. Many of the staff revealed sensitivity and

responsiveness; however, most tutors assumed that all Asian young women were aspiring to achieve a hybrid identity and were experiencing some degree of stress in so doing. This was in marked contrast to the results of the interviews with the girls themselves, where a number of young women spoke in a positive way about taking on the cultural values, habits and practices of their parents, and felt that they were not unduly stressed.

This data supports the work of Thornley and Siann (1991), who found that stereotypes regarding south Asian females are often alluded to in educational establishments. That is, a 'cultural clash' is seen to be the cause of stress for the Asian girl, with her family perceived as being the source of most anxiety. There is often little regard for, or awareness of, how the establishment itself might place limitations upon Asian young women. The discussions in part five will return to this point.

CHAPTER TEN

Staff Perceptions of Asian Young Women's Coping Strategies

Introduction

Chapter ten presents the staff's perceptions and understanding of how Asian young women at Piper College endeavour to cope with stress and anxiety. Tutors' comments were based upon their observations in the college setting. However, some teachers thought about how Asian girls might cope at home and in the community. Staff comments about the coping strategies used by Asian girls in college reflected similar themes to those mentioned by the young women themselves in chapter eight. Most staff members spoke at length about relationships between the girls and their tutors, as well as peer relationships amongst the young women. Chapter ten presents data on teachers' views about positive relationships in college that seem to offer support, and about the more difficult relationships that occasionally seem to hinder the girls in their efforts to cope. The chapter then turns to the more observable signs of coping and recounts tutors' perceptions of Asian girls' behaviour, physical appearance and attitude to work. Mention is also made of staff's observations of the young women's apparent isolation and loneliness, including the 'invisible' nature of some Asian girls' coping strategies. The analysis of data then moves on to issues of identity, including tutors' perceptions of Asian young women as they try to 'live two lives'. Finally, theoretical implications are discussed.

Figure 10.1 shows a graphic model (using NVIVO, QSR, 1999) that summarises the themes that arose from interviews with college staff about their perceptions of Asian girls' coping strategies.

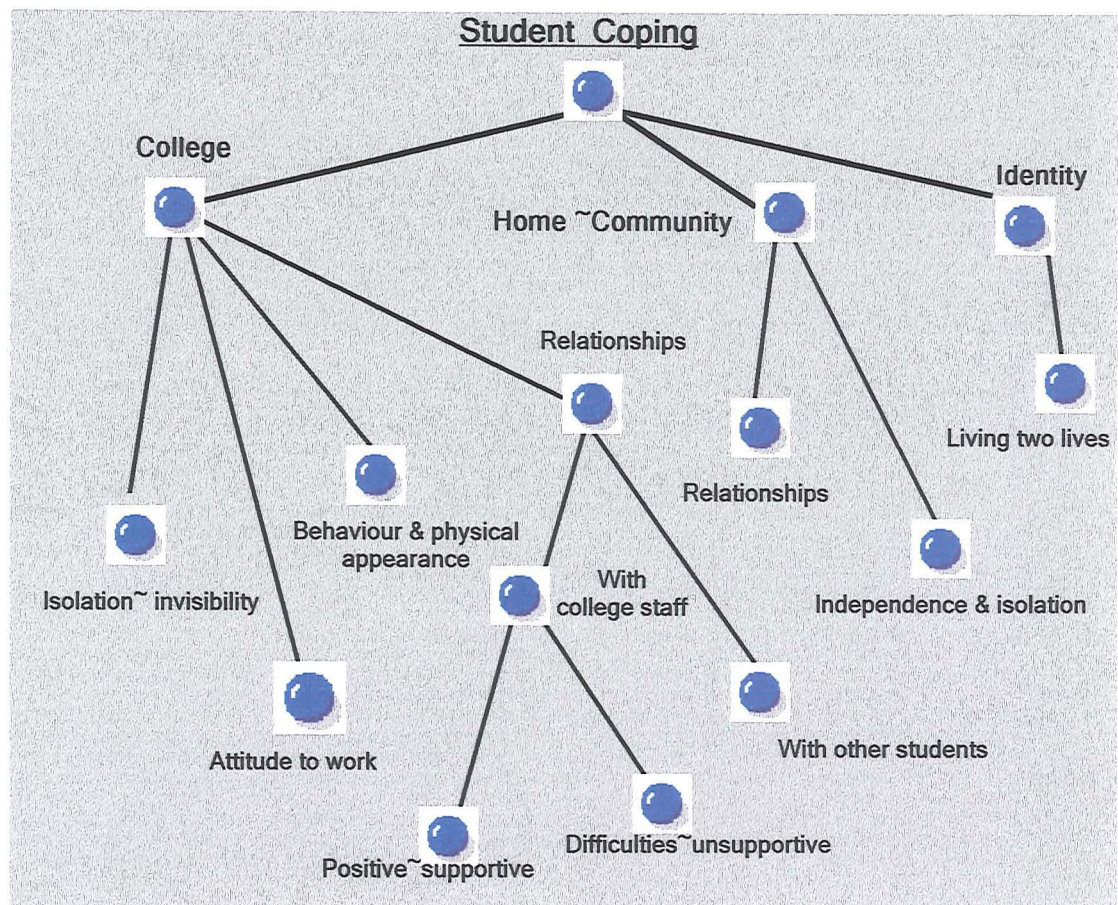


Figure 10.1 Graphic Model of Emergent Themes: Staff Perceptions of Asian Young Women's Coping Strategies.

At Home and in the Community

Relationships with Family Members

College staff generally felt that, although Asian girls would not talk to their parents about personal issues, they would be more likely to discuss topics connected to their educational progress. Several teachers thought that young women might talk to their mothers rather than their fathers but that conversation would be restricted to 'safe topics'. Kish (vice principal) put it,

"I think a lot of Asian girls talk to their mothers but the trouble is they are often locked in to a mother-daughter cycle. They have to be in fairly safe limits... I would find it hard to believe that they could talk about boyfriend issues with their mother."

As curriculum manager for careers, Linda was aware that girls often discussed options with their mothers. Ann (support tutor) agreed, adding,

"Sometimes you get a girl who says, 'My mother wants me to have the things she didn't have... education'. They are often really encouraged by their mothers."

Linda went on to say that, where older siblings had entered higher education, the 'foundations have been laid' for 'more of a normal route' into a career path.

Two teachers mentioned that young women would be highly unlikely to approach fathers, especially about boyfriends, since such relationships would be prohibited.

Caroline (senior tutor) expressed her views on the supportive nature of the extended family:

"The fabulous thing about the extended family networks when they work is that there is marvellous flexibility. If there is emotional cut-off, with your mother or your father, you have an aunt or cousin or somebody to love you. Marvellous, yeah? They will use the good things that work for them. The extended family for some people is a nightmare but the women in it are very tight knit... very understanding. There is a high level of empathy."

Caroline's discussions with young women had enabled her to realise that in the Asian extended family there would always be someone to turn to. Caroline

explained how older female family members who had 'been through and come out the other side', had found 'good things' within the Asian way of life. She added that older aunts would 'really be able to understand what is going on' and might show girls how to negotiate. Caroline put it,

"They (older aunts or sisters) may have found compromises. They may have married, and it may have been an arranged marriage, but they may have negotiated things with their husbands so that it means they can carry on studying or they put off having children. At the next stage on they have negotiated things."

Thus, college staff thought that although Asian young women might not approach their parents with personal problems, unless to discuss their education, many girls could go to an older female relative for support and advice. These views were in keeping with the comments of the Asian girls themselves.

Independence and Isolation

Two tutors were aware of Asian girls who had decided that, in order to cope, the only option open to them was to leave their family and community. Caroline (senior tutor) and Janice (subject teacher) spoke of how, when young women moved into sheltered accommodation, they felt very lonely and depressed.

Caroline said,

"Both of the young women I saw, recognized clearly that in making that step they were throwing the baby out with the bath water. They were not only leaving their family, they were leaving their community and it was going to be very, very difficult for them."

Abdul spoke of how many Asian girls now wanted 'empowerment and independence', yet those who, in an effort to cope with stress, took the extreme step of leaving their families and communities, were often depressed as a result. Living in isolation from all that was familiar would also invoke a huge sense of loss.

At College

Relationships with Other Students

All 16 members of staff interviewed commented about the strong peer support that Asian girls received from each other. These views reflected those of the young women themselves. Iram (subject tutor) put it,

“I think they talk to each other. I don’t think they actually find any resolutions because everyone is in the same boat. I think they can listen to each other, but they haven’t got the outside view. No-one has the answer.”

Abdul, another Asian teacher, spoke about the lack of ‘outside perspective’ and the insular nature of the girls’ friendships. Lisa (senior tutor) described her observations of the intensity of Asian young women’s friendships when she said,

“They walk along the corridor six abreast, or sit together giggling and shrieking about things. They will all understand absolutely what the situation is because they are living and breathing it all the time.”

Nasma (Asian counsellor) explained the necessity for Asian girls to ‘only speak to their friends’, saying,

“There is a cultural taboo... you don’t parade your difficulties. You’ve got to safeguard your secrets in your own family so you can only talk to your (other Asian, female) friends.”

Although Asian young women are perceived by staff as keeping ‘things to themselves’, that is, the problems are not discussed outside the peer group, one teacher mentioned that the girls often seemed to dramatise their difficulties by sharing it with all Asian female students in the college. She added, ‘everything is an event’.

Abdul (an Asian subject teacher) felt that some young women hope for a mythical hero to rescue them. He put it,

“They still have a textbook image of a knight in shining armour coming to alleviate all their problems. That is where the problem is because essentially, the knight might be a boyfriend in college.”

In Abdul's view, although having a boyfriend is disapproved of by their parents, Asian girls often see such a relationship as a way of escape and a source of comfort. Such relationships may, in turn, isolate Asian girls from some of their peers if they also disapprove. Janice (subject teacher) had been aware of occasions when an Asian girl's behaviour was deemed to be inappropriate by her female friends, which resulted in her being isolated. Janice commented that if a girl was 'not liked for some reason' she could very easily be 'shut out' by her peers.

Positive Relationships with Staff

Members of staff were generally confident that, when Asian girls needed support from tutors, they would know who to go to. Kish (vice principal for pastoral care) commented,

"I think students know enough teachers between them to know who to go to."

Lisa (senior tutor) was very sure that the pastoral system worked well. She explained,

"Sometimes they will latch on to a particular teacher and talk to them... I quite often have young women coming in to talk. Quite a lot of tutors are very good, very sensitive and get to know the girls very well. Some are absolutely brilliant and know them all as individuals and support them all and discuss difficulties with senior tutors as soon as they spot them."

During the interviews with college staff, it became clear that some tutors spent a great deal of time in offering pastoral support whilst others referred girls on to colleagues if they were aware of difficulties. Notably, Asian girls discussed personal difficulties with tutors who made themselves available to offer support on non-pastoral issues such as learning or careers. Students were aware that such teachers would usually be in their office with an 'open door'. Jean (non-teaching student administrator) also found herself in a position to offer pastoral support since she could always be found in the reception area. These staff members were the same as those named by the girls themselves as being approachable and

trustworthy. Interestingly, during their interviews, a few Asian young women had named Lisa (senior tutor) as someone in whom they would not confide since she seemed to be preoccupied with their academic success.

It became clear that some tutors devoted a significant amount of time to pastoral concerns. During the interview with Caroline (senior tutor) there were Asian young women waiting outside her office. Our session finished early in order for her to see them. Several girls cited Ann (learning support teacher) as being someone to whom they felt they could disclose personal issues. Five of the staff members, including an Asian male tutor, also specifically named Ann as providing a major source of pastoral care. Lynn (educational psychologist) explained,

“I think they will go and see somebody like Ann. She has a huge holding role. I think people go to her for study skills and she is there... she is sympathetic. A bit like a peg thing... you can go in and things start to come. In fact she has tremendous difficulty in dealing with ongoing counselling needs... girls that aren't willing to go and see counsellors”.

Ann told of how students might be referred to her, in the first instance, for help with study skills or course work. Since much of her time is spent in the 'key skills' room, Ann is usually available to offer help. She commented,

“Sometimes they want to talk or one of the students might bring a friend along and say, 'Can she talk to you?' ”

Ann continued,

“I can't spend all my time talking but if they need to talk to someone, then they do. We have a counsellor here but they need to book up... and well, you can't always save your problems for Monday week.”

Ann went on to explain how she had often developed close relationships with students with special educational needs because she saw them on a regular basis. She gave one anecdote of an Asian young woman who thought she might be pregnant and had asked Ann for advice. Ann said,

“She was absolutely terrified... she didn't have a clue what to do. She wanted to tell me but she didn't want me to do anything. I got telephone numbers ready for her but it was solved quite quickly... I don't think she was pregnant. I thought it would have been better for an Asian organisation to help her... but it was good that she could actually tell someone because there was absolutely no-one at home that she could possibly tell.”

In her role as special educational needs support teacher, Ann had been able to develop a sufficiently close relationship that ensured the young woman could confide in her. A relationship had already been established before there was a need for pastoral care.

Another member of staff in a position to offer 'open door' pastoral care was Trish, a tutor in the careers department. Linda, a curriculum manager for careers, was aware that Trish often provided emotional support for Asian girls. She explained,

"We are initially approached on issues that relate to progression and then in discussion other factors come out. Trish is on site and because she is in the room more often than I am she tends to develop longer-term relationships with the students. She is able to spend more time listening to them and it becomes a repeat contact. It has become known that she will spend time with students and students will go to her."

Like Ann, Trish was readily available and in a position to develop ongoing relationships with students ensuring that trust was established before a pastoral need or crisis arose.

Jean, a student administrator located in the reception area, saw students on a daily basis. She was often the first person to be called if there was a crisis and a 'first aider' could not be found. As well as being first on the scene when a young woman experienced a panic attack or hyperventilation, she often had to attend to girls who had apparently attempted suicide. It is Jean's responsibility to make any necessary calls to the emergency services. Jean described how she had developed close relationships with several girls who had been at crisis point and had often continued the contact over a number of years. On one occasion she was even invited to a young woman's wedding. Jean also described how, during a break from university, a young woman had returned to the college to thank Jean and apologise for her behaviour when she had been at Piper College. She explained that since she was not a teacher, they saw her as a 'kind of mother'. (My own experience confirms this. During my seven years as an educational psychologist at Piper College, often girls told me that they could talk to Jean.)

The Asian teachers were clearly in a different position with respect to the girls. Iram, Iqbal and Abdul presented different aspects to their pastoral care. Iram felt that many Asian girls in her health and social care group were able to approach her as a friend. She commented,

“I hope I am a friend to them... and I hope I am quite a refreshing change to them, the fact that they don’t see me as a teacher. I think they sit there and talk. I think that is important. They give their views about parents and marriage ... and let it all out. I started hearing from girls that don’t usually speak. That was quite nice. I didn’t care it took 45 minutes out of the lesson. I think it was necessary.”

The girls in Iram’s classes obviously felt comfortable speaking about personal issues, knowing that Iram would have a level of empathy and understanding that non-Asian teachers could not offer. Iram was not preoccupied with continuing academic progress if she felt that her students had a greater need to be ‘listened to’.

Iqbal and Abdul thought that Asian girls might be less comfortable speaking to Asian males, although young women often presumed that they understood their circumstances. Abdul explained,

“Certainly a few Asian girls talk informally about stresses. It’s amazing how they see an Asian person and what they will come out with immediately. They are so forthcoming. I mean you get things you don’t want to deal with as a teacher... it’s amazing how the colour of your skin dictates how much people will want to come forward to you.”

Abdul also spoke about the influence of the Asian patriarchal network and ‘system of Asian culture’. He felt that some young women responded with deference to Asian males and said,

“They still have this thing inbred in them that the males are always the ones with the yea’s and no’s ... all the answers and the do’s and don’ts. They look for this male role model... they want to break out and for you to understand. I say, ‘Yeah, but I’m a guy... how do you expect me to react?’ and they say, ‘Don’t you have a sister or a wife?’ It’s amazing how much they rely on male influence.”

Abdul felt that this put him in a position of some responsibility since he is viewed as a representative of male Asian culture. He felt that, whilst he was very willing to discuss some issues, the girls might feel more comfortable with a female Asian counsellor.

Iqbal was proactive in dealing with issues. He explained that he would often instigate class discussion on sensitive topics:

“I do it half jokingly but half the time I do it to sort of work out who is under what pressure, and how they respond tells me the ones that are under pressure. Some of them are more stressed than boys... quite a lot more. It depends if they are very traditional. I put feelers out to see what is happening and sometimes they respond.”

Iqbal was particularly sensitive to the role that many Asian girls take on at home. His awareness of the experiences of his sisters made him realise that heavy homework loads were often difficult where a girl had many household tasks to perform. Iqbal spoke of his sisters' unhappiness and of the common bond that he felt he shared with Asian students.

The Asian teachers realised that they were in a unique position to offer empathy and support to Asian girls. To the young women, the boundaries between ‘friend’ and teacher were often cloudy and all three Asian tutors were acutely aware that their views would be listened to and respected. Thus, Iqbal, Abdul and Iram were under greater pressure to provide pastoral care whilst offering helpful role models at the same time. The presence of Asian teachers at Piper College, while invaluable, seems to mean that they inevitably take on greater pastoral responsibilities.

All teachers were aware that girls chose whom to speak to. Janice (subject teacher) put it,

“They know who they like... it very much depends on the relationship and where relationships are strong they may well be the first port of call.”

Furthermore, where positive teacher/pupil relationships existed, members of staff were often asked to act as ‘go-betweens’, especially to white, male teachers.

Janice explained,

“You hear students say, ‘Will you tell him that this is happening? Because I don’t want to talk about it or he will say something and it will upset me.’”

Ann had been asked on occasions to act as a ‘go-between’ with parents on behalf of Asian girls. She said,

“They ask me if I will ring their parents so that they can stay later at college, in the library or computer room, because they might get into trouble if the parents think they are doing something with boys.”

The staff interviews revealed that, where trust was established between Asian girls and individual tutors, a great deal of pastoral support was offered and received. Sue (curriculum manager) gave her impressions:

“Quite a lot of stuff is confidential. They will tell me if they want to... they know they always can and they know that I wouldn’t pass it on.”

Sue went on to tell of how, if the problem was serious or she felt she could not deal with it, for example, family planning or abuse issues, she would refer the student on to a senior tutor. Sue concluded,

“They know that I am not shockable... my face won’t give anything away.”

In the teachers’ view, the key elements in positive relationships between tutors and Asian girls seemed to be availability, trust and a genuine desire to offer pastoral care. Janice said that she thought that everyone ‘tried’ although some of the staff were ‘absolutely brilliant’ and others were ‘less so’. In Caroline’s opinion, although some teachers’ approaches were ‘a bit crude’ or ‘dot-to-dot’, ‘generally people’s hearts are in the right place’.

Most teachers felt that they were able to offer pastoral care to some degree, yet a minority clearly provided an inordinate level of pastoral support. It is interesting to note that, during their interviews, the young women had said that they would rarely, if ever, approach college staff with personal concerns, although several girls specifically named Ann (learning support teacher) as someone in whom they would confide. It would seem that college staff are more optimistic about the efficacy of the pastoral care system than are the Asian young women themselves.

Relationship Difficulties with College Staff

Several teachers felt that it was enormously difficult to fully understand the circumstances that many Asian young women find themselves to be in. Two male tutors were especially lucid when voicing their feelings. Kish (vice principal) put it,

“I don’t think a lot of staff here are aware, or their awareness is very, very superficial. There is some kind of perception that it is all ultra super or it is all hideous. I don’t think there is any real depth. The majority of staff come in to do their job and I wouldn’t say they are particularly perceptive.”

Tom (head of faculty for learning support) tried to explain the difficulties of trying to comprehend what life might be like for the Asian girl. He said,

“You can get a kind of philosophical feel about another culture but you are not directly experiencing it. You are coming across students, parents... living in the area or whatever. We have an understanding through what we read and from talking to them... but to actually have a genuine understanding... I mean after a decade or more here, my awareness still of what life is like for a lot of them... is... I mean I go through huge learning curves... leaps. It might be just the odd thing. It might be a girl doing a piece of autobiographical writing which really opens up your eyes to a particular issue or incident.”

During the staff interviews, it became apparent that the relationships between Asian young women and their tutors were intricate. Furthermore, some aspects of the relationships were not evident to all members of staff. Even where tutors, like Tom and Kish, made every effort in trying to comprehend the everyday lives of Asian girls, they could not always conceive the many complexities inherent in the cultural differences.

The issues raised by the tutors, concerning difficult aspects of their relationships with Asian girls, covered several areas. The following sections will highlight the most dominant themes that arose from the data, these were: cultural differences and the nature of appropriate pastoral support; Western perspectives of equal opportunities; the college priority of academic success over supporting pastoral needs; the apparent ‘macho’ culture of Piper College; perceived difficulties of

Asian girls' relationships and responses to Asian tutors; and the invisibility of Asian young women's emotional needs.

Cultural Differences and Appropriate Pastoral Support

Nasma (Asian student counsellor) spoke about how non-Asian teachers may think they are being helpful in offering what, to them, seems appropriate advice. In practice, their recommended course of action may be impossible for Asian girls to follow. She explained:

“The girls find this huge gap around their family. Their teachers can't even imagine some of the things they are going through. Because to them it's outrageous that something like that could even be happening. But it's very normal to the Asian young woman... so then this horror and shock is displayed and it doesn't really help... the situation becomes worse. If a girl said, 'Oh my god, my parents want me to go back to Bangladesh and get married because I am 16', the English counsellor might say, 'My goodness, your parents should be arrested for this kind of bad behaviour!'”

Where a girl is fearful of an impending arranged marriage, a tutor may support her and offer to help her find alternative accommodation because that is what she or he would choose to do if placed in the same circumstances. In Western society, leaving home during adolescence is seen as 'normal' and, in many cases, a sign that the young person is moving towards independence and adulthood. However, there are many repercussions, as Nasma went on to explain. She said,

“She is not in an emotionally fit state to make up her own proper mind. She not only loses her family, she loses her community. There's loss of face and honour. There is loss of prospective marriage in the community. She would be ostracized. Her reputation is tarred for the rest of her life.”

The Asian community goes to great lengths to support girls as they take up their roles as respected wives and mothers. Asian families place high regard on their daughters since they carry the family *izzat* or honour. Young women who openly reject all the fundamental principles of sharing in the collective responsibility of

the family and community are perceived as abandoning the very essence of their cultural heritage.

Perspectives on Equal Opportunities

One senior tutor, Hilary, spoke about her difficulties in meeting the pastoral needs of Asian girls. She described her own inadequacies and said that she was aware that she was 'not always very perceptive about what particular things affect individuals'. Hilary commented,

"I am probably one of the less perceptive. In a way it is odd that I have ended up in pastoral care. Somebody said that to me this week. Cassie (a previous member of staff) used to tell me that I hadn't a clue what was really going on."

Hilary was clearly disturbed and upset by an ongoing dispute with a Muslim girl. The Asian young woman had made a formal complaint about Hilary's views and attitude. Hilary had told the girl that, for health and safety reasons, she would not be able to wear a full-length *hijab* or veil when on placement as a nursery nurse. The young woman felt strongly that, in order to practise her religion, she should wear her veil. Hilary told the story:

"She said that anybody who isn't wearing that (*hijab*) is not a practising Muslim. Now my own use of the word *practise* would mean that they are going to a mosque fairly regularly... as with a practising Christian. Some of these girls are going so much into their own religion that they end up in conflict with everybody... their own culture. I felt that what she said was offensive to other Muslims. Ultimately health and safety must come first if you are responsible for young children. You can't do it wearing that long baggy thing. She suggested that I was insulting her religion. In fact she was being fairly fundamentalist."

Hilary discussed the situation at length and with some emotion. She also expressed her anger about Muslim boys' comments regarding appropriate dress for female teachers when she said,

"I will wear whatever bloody clothes I like, thank you very much. They have no right to impose their values on us any more than we have a right to impose our values on them. I think they have less right because they have chosen to come and live in this culture."

Hilary clearly wanted to 'help people' as best she could but felt that she was ill-informed and 'left wondering'. For Hilary the issue was complex since, to her, it seemed that the principle of equal opportunities was in danger of being compromised. She explained,

"I think there is sometimes a danger that we might feel that these (Asian) girls have problems out of proportion to other people. I am sure Afro-Caribbean girls come with their own baggage and possibly even a few of the white girls. I know that I could get away with questioning my own religion (Hilary was a lay-preacher in a Christian church) but I am not allowed to question anyone else's. We are too scared to be told that we are being prejudiced. We are told to back off."

Hilary's strength of feeling was demonstrated as she went on to discuss the housing situation in her London borough where she felt that 'some of the poor whites must feel that the Asians get everything: housing, jobs' and that 'the poor white sods at the bottom wonder why they end up being racist'. She concluded,

"I would be a bit wary of putting too much there to help the Asian girls because I am not sure 100% that they have enough of a bigger problem than everybody else to warrant special treatment. You need to keep a balance and equality of support. I am all for living for others but I don't see why I should keep being the one who compromises all the time. We should all compromise."

Hilary felt hurt and confused. It seemed that she was trying to understand the girls' situation from her own Christian perspective. Doubtless many Muslim females, in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, safely engage in childcare whilst wearing a *hijab*. Hilary's conflict with the Asian trainee nursery nurse was, on the surface, based upon Westernised notions of appropriate dress for childcare. However, as the topic was discussed, it became clear that Hilary's deeply held core constructs, about what constitutes *equal opportunities*, was at the heart of her discomfort. Hilary felt that the college system did not support her and that it was biased towards ethnic minorities in its equal opportunity policy. Whilst Hilary endeavoured to respond to Asian girls, she was aware of some of the complexities involved in providing appropriate academic and pastoral support and felt that she was somehow caught in the middle.

Academic Success as a Priority

The themes that emerged from the interview data revealed that staff saw their colleagues as being either aware of the pastoral needs of Asian girls to some extent or as seeing the pursuit of academic success as the college priority.

Despite providing time for girls to discuss personal issues, Iram (subject tutor) said that she knew she was at Piper College 'to do a job', that is, to teach health and social care. She stated that she was not there for the 'emotional needs' of students. It seemed that the college culture promoted the importance of academic success above all else. Iram was aware that some teachers 'stick on policy' and the importance of 'getting through the course'. Linda (curriculum manager) also spoke about this issue when she said,

"I think that there is certainly a feeling within the college that tutor staff cannot cope with all situations. They help out to a certain level but they see it as not their responsibility."

Some teachers, holding *individualistic* views, saw little relevance in offering 'emotional support' but were very willing to spend personal time and energy in enabling students to achieve academic goals. There were teachers who found themselves to be between these two positions, Hilary being one example. She explained how, in her opinion, some teachers regarded students as 'a bloody nuisance' if they were absent or did not complete coursework. With some honesty, Hilary spoke about her own dilemma:

"You know I don't want kids to disclose to me what doesn't affect me. I think I can make that clear by my body language and attitude. You know... come and tell me your problems but only so far. I don't want to get dragged in if I can avoid it. I will help them achieve their best (academically) but I don't want them to pour out all their troubles because I find listening quite difficult. I would be more likely to tell them to pull themselves together and get on with it."

Hilary's honesty tells a complex story. Where staff are aware of pastoral needs they have to make a personal decision about how far they will go in meeting those needs. This theme is highlighted in order to emphasize how some teachers seem to make a conscious decision to ignore emotional issues and press on with providing academic guidance. It is important to reiterate that the members of

staff who volunteered to be interviewed were already aware of, and had an interest in, issues relating to the emotional needs of Asian young women. The sample was therefore heavily biased and did not, on the whole, include the views of teachers who placed emphasis upon academic excellence and saw little need for pastoral support.

The *Macho* Culture

In Tom's view some tutors were completely blind to all aspects of pastoral and emotional care. He put it,

"I am going to say something very damning. There are loads of dinosaurs within this college who still regard things initially as ... you know... the problem is the work is not being done... da, da, da... and really don't get their heads around it. They think that students are just being willingly naughty. Very few don't do the work because of that. I think there would be some staff who would not be sufficiently sympathetic, even if they were told... staggeringly ... Not because they are bad people but quite simply because they don't have the imagination. They have been switched off for so long or they have put themselves into a role of seeing how they teach as being the most significant thing. The rules, the college... everything else."

Tom went on to say that he felt the 'worst offenders' were 'a collection of senior, male tutors' who have not 'moved on in their thinking' from the days of house-masters and who placed 'procedure' above all else. He described how he had overheard a male, senior tutor referring to a student, who was having course work difficulties because English was his second language, as a 'lazy bugger' and 'little sod'. Tom felt that most tutors, in that particular faculty, viewed such students as 'problems'. Another comment he had overheard was:

"I just wish she (Asian girl) would get her personal problems sorted out and restart the course in September."

These comments suggest that some teachers take no part in, or responsibility for, addressing pastoral needs. Tom also felt that these tutors were in danger of 'adding to their (Asian girls) anxiety' by,

“...the lack of empowering of them. It can be the most incidental thing... a lack of awareness... not paying attention to your role in the classroom... being so machismo.”

In Tom's opinion such tutors were not intentionally damaging but their whole teaching approach reflected, in many cases, a dominating masculine culture where any display of emotion is deemed to be a weakness. The college environment itself seemed to be hostile to good levels of empathy.

Several members of staff brought up the topic of male teachers. Ann (learning support teacher) felt that many men avoided emotional issues and 'wouldn't dream of talking about their personal lives', let alone anyone else's. Linda (curriculum manager) was aware that male tutors often worked closely with students on work-related issues. However, where problems arose 'outside of the general teaching curriculum', Linda felt that some male teachers 'find it difficult to cope'. Iram thought that the situation was complicated by Asian young women's own perceptions, since traditionally, emotional issues are not discussed by men. Iqbal (Asian male subject tutor) reinforced this view. He said,

“If they haven't really talked to me maybe that's because I am a bloke. Maybe a female tutor would get a different angle.”

Iqbal's comments suggest that even when a male tutor is willing to address emotional issues, the girls themselves may feel uncomfortable to do so. He made the point that since he is not a 'traditional Asian male', in that he is 'not really a believer', Asian girls may be less likely to approach him. Iqbal's point being that, just because there is a common ethnicity, it does not necessarily mean there are shared values.

Asian Young Women's Relationships with Asian Tutors

From the discussion, it emerged that Asian girls' relationships with Asian tutors could be both positive and negative. The previous section presented some of the advantages in there being Asian tutors but some teachers pointed out potential difficulties. Lisa (senior tutor) thought that Asian young women might 'fear...

the community network', in that the girls might worry that 'word would get back' via Asian teachers. Iram agreed that 'fear of gossip' might prevent girls from disclosing their emotional difficulties to Asian tutors and suggested that 'many feel strongly about not sharing their views with strangers'.

Iram identified another potential strain in the relationship. As an Asian female, she felt herself to be in an especially delicate position since Asian girls often saw her as an ally. She explained that her commitment was to students 'more than parents' but how, on occasions, girls had asked her to withhold information from their parents, for example about absences. Iram had made it clear that she would not 'lie for them' but that she would make every effort not to 'jeopardize them in terms of their parents'.

Asian Young Women's Attitude to College Work

10 of the 16 members of staff interviewed spoke about their observations of Asian girls' approach to college work. Some teachers thought that many Asian girls attend college to 'have a good time' and escape the pressures of home. Lisa (senior tutor) explained,

"They enjoy being here and they will do anything to stay here because they are having a good time. But when they know that there is nothing to be gained from working hard in their studies then they just don't bother. They know that they are not going to be allowed to go to university."

Iram (subject teacher) also thought that many Asian young women try to 'escape' pressures by 'having a giggle' and 'not doing their work'. Iqbal (subject tutor) said that many girls 'know that they have got a limited time', since they 'are going to have to settle down and get married', and their 'college agenda' is therefore about enjoying 'a few years of freedom'. Iqbal went on to say that, in his opinion, some Asian girls subsequently underachieve. Jean (student administrator) commented,

"A lot of them come for the social life and don't really work hard. They have such a lovely time here... and things are not restricted."

Thus, Asian girls were perceived as coping with the impending pressures of home life, including marriage, by 'having a good time' and enjoying their freedom whilst at college.

Janice (subject co-ordinator) held the opinion that some young women 'just seem to totally bury themselves in their work'. She said,

"Some of them see it as a way out. If they can get to university... they can get away."

Abdul (subject tutor) put it,

"I think it (stress) affects them in two ways. It pushes them to work really hard or the complete opposite... they can't concentrate."

In Lisa's opinion, many young women realize that, in order to stay at college, they have to fulfil course requirements. She commented,

"Often those that survive the first year realize that the only way they are going to get another year of this is by getting on with their work. If we can catch them and explain it to them."

Ann (support teacher) was aware that many Asian girls are keen to take up all offers of help in order to achieve their qualifications. Caroline (senior tutor) spoke about the apparent ability of many Asian young women to drive themselves towards their academic goals. She explained,

"Asian women get organised, they find out what they have to do, they work together and support each other and get the work done... because that is what they do at home."

Behaviour and Physical Appearance

Six tutors spoke about their perceptions of Asian girls' behaviour in college. Most staff commented on the young women's obvious sense of freedom when at college. Kish (vice principal) mentioned that Asian girls were often to be found on the premises until the college gates were locked. He described the scenario:

"Girls want to be here very early in the morning. At the end of the day if we didn't actually push them out, they would probably be quite happy to sit here until six. Your typical white kid can't wait to get out of college."

Kish went on to explain that since attending college is often deemed by parents to be acceptable behaviour for their daughters, many girls use the college setting to have a social life. He continued,

“They are in their own kind of peer group. Relaxing, talking to girl friends...not boyfriends but guys... they are perfectly normal. They can be themselves. I suspect that they don’t have the same sort of freedom at home.”

Some tutors felt that, on occasions, Asian girls ‘abused their freedom’ and indulged in ‘outrageous’ and ‘inappropriate behaviour’, for example, running and screaming around the corridors. Lisa (senior tutor) thought that some young women were having a ‘last look at freedom’ and were unable to ‘handle it’. She went on to say that many did not seem to realise that such behaviour, if it continued, would ultimately result in their college place being terminated. Furthermore, when the implications were put to the girls, they were apt to make excuses and try to avoid staff. Lisa also felt that, sometimes, Asian young women would say that ‘difficulties at home’ were inhibiting their progress, knowing that staff would be sympathetic. Lisa was of the opinion that such comments were often used as an excuse.

Caroline (senior tutor) thought that the relative freedom of the college environment also presented a dilemma for some Asian girls about whether or not to become involved in a sexual relationship. The ‘safe, protected environment’ of college offered many opportunities for ‘chit-chat with boys’ and the chance to ‘have fun’ before entering marriage or becoming more involved in family life. Caroline put it,

“They want to be sexy and they want to have sexual relationships quite often. Do they or don’t they have sexual relationships?”

The relative freedom of the college setting provides opportunities for behaviour and relationships that would be wholly unacceptable at home.

Several teachers described the signs that indicated young women were taking advantage of their perceived liberty when at college. Caroline gave this example:

“The girls will come in with their very deliberate straight sombre scarves... go into the toilets, rip their scarves off, put their makeup on...

come out, wander round the college, do their thing, have their day at college and at 5'o clock ... go back into the toilets, take their makeup off, put their scarves back on and their dads and brothers will pick them up."

Ann (support teacher) was also aware of such behaviour but said that where changes in girls' appearances were more permanent, for example, long hair cut short, parents expressed their concern and, on occasions, tried to stop their daughters from attending college. For some young women, remaining in the traditional shalwar *kameez* and *hijab* (long trousers, shirt and scarf) was a condition of their being allowed to attend Piper College.

Isolation and Invisibility

A central theme of this thesis is Asian young women's 'invisible needs'.

Teachers' comments indicated that even where the pastoral needs of Asian young women were recognized (and often they were not) the intricate interplay between Asian culture and college culture often hindered the ability of staff to respond appropriately.

The complexities involved in supporting Asian girls' emotional needs were very evident as staff spoke about their relationships with students. Janice (subject teacher) explained how large class sizes affected personal contact with students. She said,

"You don't give them the impression that you actually want to know them and it is very difficult... Asian girls are particularly quiet and they tend not to want to cause problems... they don't actually come and tell you".

Jean (student administrator) confirmed this view, saying that in her experience Asian girls would not go to tutors to talk 'of their own volition' but would only do so 'if summoned'. Ann (support teacher) reiterated what the girls had said when she commented that 'it was the luck of the draw' as to which tutors Asian girls were given, implying that some were more approachable than others. Ann added that teachers who were perceived by girls to be sympathetic were often

overloaded, and that 'you don't have a lot of time to make a relationship'. Caroline (senior tutor) pointed out that emotional difficulties need to be addressed with sensitivity and teachers 'have to be very careful that they are non-intrusive'. Abdul (subject teacher) thought that Asian young women's emotional difficulties are only 'picked up by accident or default'; he gave the example of poor academic performance being attributed to a 'lack of attentiveness'. Teachers' comments indicated that there were some girls for whom invisibility was an integral part of their coping mechanism.

Nasma (Asian student counsellor) spoke with some emotion and empathy when she said,

"A lot of them don't come forward. It is very much bubbling under the surface but not ever coming on top because of fear of people finding out ... fear of not finding the right kind of understanding... fear of parents finding out and getting to know that they have been complaining. There are so many fears involved."

It would seem that, for some Asian girls, there is more to be lost than gained in speaking about their anxieties and difficulties. Fear of repercussions from family and community and concerns about staff being unable to understand their unique situation seem to make silent suffering the only option.

During their interviews, many Asian girls named Ann as being the source of enormous support. Ann's colleagues also mentioned that they perceived her to be the core provider of emotional help for many students (along with Beth, and the college counsellors). Yet Ann herself was aware that there were many girls who had not 'had a chance to talk to people'. She put it,

"There are those in greater need. There are quite a lot of miserable girls and we don't know why they are like that. I think there are quite a few who don't say anything and they are totally miserable and you don't know until they do something."

Even the most perceptive of staff realised that the emotional needs of many Asian young women either go unnoticed by college staff or the girls themselves never actively seek help.

Lynn (educational psychologist) was aware that many girls 'cope on their own'. Abdul (subject teacher) described how some girls 'go into a shell and start cocooning themselves in their own thoughts'. Janice (subject co-ordinator) thought that 'Asian girls are particularly quiet' and that they 'tend to not to want to cause problems' and so did not tell her about any difficulties they might be experiencing. Jean (student administrator) confirmed this view since, in her conversations with girls over health issues, for example, after a panic attack, she had found that most girls had not confided in college staff prior to the incident. Where young women did not request support, some tutors felt that nothing could be done since it was crucial to respect their privacy.

Staff who were directly concerned with supporting emotional needs commented that the only sure way an Asian girl's pastoral needs would be recognized was if there was a dramatic event. Beth, Ann and Jean all gave examples of situations where Asian girls, who had not previously exhibited any obvious signs of distress or difficulty, had experienced panic attacks, hyperventilation or taken a drug overdose. Sometimes, young women would go on to display signs of anxiety by repeated panic attacks or breathing difficulties. Where girls had a history of apparent suicide attempts or drug overdose, the college staff would monitor them closely. Several tutors voiced their concerns about their total inability to spot the warning signs before a crisis occurred.

Ann and Beth also told of rumours that would reach them via other students. Worryingly, they were often unable to follow up their concerns since a girl may have already left college. Beth explained that girls would 'suddenly disappear' and their peers would inform college staff that they had got married. Ann gave more alarming examples:

"You haven't had a chance to talk and you hear of girls being locked at home and they try to jump out of the window but you don't know. There are girls you get worried about and you don't see them for a while. They might disappear and the family say they have gone to Pakistan or another college. It is very hard because you don't know what is wrong."

Ann thought that most Asian girls' emotional needs remained invisible to all but their close female Asian friends.

Identity: Living Two Lives

Half of the teachers interviewed said that they were aware of an enormous contrast between the role played by many Asian young women when at college and when at home. However, views were divided between those tutors who felt that there were negative and difficult aspects of 'living two lives', and those who saw the dual roles as effective and a positive aspect of Asian girls' lives.

Tom (head of learning support) expressed his views:

"A lot of them are coming from families where there is quite a defined role and I think they are meeting with a different kind of role within college. I should imagine for a lot (of Asian girls) it is kind of like divided loyalties and an incredible amount of mixed messages."

Lisa (senior tutor) also spoke about 'divided loyalties' and how parental expectations, about academic progress and behaviour, clash 'almost one hundred percent with what they actually experience' when they attend Piper College. Lisa concluded,

"A lot of them find it extremely difficult to handle. They are living a double life."

Abdul (subject teacher) discussed both the negative and positive aspects of portraying a double identity. He explained that many Asian girls 'find there are certain discrepancies between what they're told and what they really want to do'.

Abdul described how 'the presentation of the self' is changed. He continued,

"Immediately you can see that there is a difference between them (Asian girls) and a typical English girl who adopts the same image day in and day out. I think a lot of Asian girls are constantly changing their image and part of their identity, as well, by the time they've got home (after college). There is definitely a conscience clash there."

However, Abdul also discussed the positive aspects of 'living two lives' in that some Asian girls seem to relish the dual nature of their lives. He said,

"To be honest with you, they do cope OK and they love the fact that their parents rely on them so much and are proud of them. Success is success, whatever way you look at it. Some of them do manage to cope pretty well."

Caroline (senior tutor) also spoke about the advantageous aspects of 'living a dual life'. She reasoned that, 'if you look at how many (Asian) women really break away' from the family structure, the number of women who actually leave is 'minute'. Caroline continued,

"I wonder why. The extended family network and the lots and lots of informal structures within the family mean that people will be helped. And bright, intelligent young women who are flexible and who look at the world creatively and who take their friends and opportunities where they can... those are the women who survive and manage to lead a dual life."

By leading a 'dual life', the Asian girl might reap the benefits of the Western college system and retain the advantages of being part of an Asian family and community.

Discussion

All staff members were aware that Asian young women face dilemmas about the extent to which they should integrate into Western society. Most teachers were of the opinion that a major source of stress came from the process of trying to negotiate the path between home and college. However, Kish (vice principal) and Abdul (subject teacher), both Asian males, seemed to suggest that, although the movement towards *integration* into Western society is fraught with anxiety and competing tensions for Asian young women, it is a coping mechanism in itself. Several tutors described their observations of Asian girls as they tried to *compartmentalize* (Breakwell, 1986) their lives. The dual roles and personas they adopt seem to be highly successful in enabling many of them to cope.

The teachers' views support those of Modood et al. (1997), Hutnik (1991) and Ghuman (1994, 1995) who found that the majority of second and new generation Asian young people sought *integration* as a preferred mode of adaptation. Abdul was of the opinion that,

“Because Asian culture is given more exposure within English culture, they (Asian young people) are becoming more comfortable with it... they will eventually just be themselves.”

Abdul gave examples of aspects of Asian culture that Asian adolescents are proud to associate with: music, fashion and mendi (semi-permanent tattoos). Abdul felt that by moving towards *acculturation* and *integration*, Asian young women were making life easier for themselves and for future generations.

Ghuman (1994) and Drury (1991) maintain that Asian girls are given less personal freedom than boys and that the issue of relationships with boys is often the cause of parent/daughter conflict. However, Kish felt that parents are learning to cope with even that thorny issue in that they allow their daughters to attend a mixed gender college. Abdul also thought that some tutors did not know that many parents were enabling their daughters to cope by offering support.

Most of the staff realised that the coping strategies of Asian young women were various. Teachers knew of Asian girls who coped with the Western college system by protecting themselves from constructs that conflicted with their family values. In Kelly's (1955) terms, the girls avoided those values that posed a threat to their *core constructs*. Tom (head of learning support) gave the example of girls who had strongly-held Muslim beliefs always wearing traditional Muslim dress, including a *hijab* or veil. According to Tom, some of these young women actively resisted what they saw as inappropriate Western values, for example, they refused to take copies of the free college magazine because it displayed pictures of girls who were scantily dressed and in full make-up. Tom felt that, in actively avoiding representations of Western values, some Asian girls are able to 'protect themselves'.

Other teachers commented upon their observations of Asian young women who were clearly moving towards 'independence and empowerment' as a way of coping. Inevitably, these girls would have to cope with knowing that their core constructs and values were at odds with their parents' belief system. The Asian tutors and learning support staff seemed to be aware that in rejecting their family

values the girls were endeavouring to cope in a Western world. However, the use of such coping strategies seemed also to be a source of stress.

College staff seemed to be of the opinion that most Asian young women use *compartmentalization* (Breakwell, 1986) as a bi-cultural method of coping. They gave several examples of their observations of Asian girls changing their physical appearance and demeanour upon entering the college premises. When speaking about Asian girls' coping mechanisms, teachers did not touch on Folkman and Lazarus' (1980) *problem-focused* coping strategies. Rather, tutors were unanimous in suggesting that Asian girls use *emotion-focused* coping methods, since Asian young women very rarely refer to anyone but each other for support and help with anxiety. Just as the tensions and anxieties of Asian young women are usually hidden from staff, so too, it seems, are the coping strategies. That is, the teachers' comments demonstrated that the whole process of Asian girls' stress and coping is largely invisible.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The College Context

Introduction

Chapter eleven presents data about staff's own experiences of the college context that emerged from the interviews with tutors. Two distinct topics arose: one theme focused upon the college system and its response to Asian young women and their parents; the other centred on the staff themselves and their experiences of stress and coping.

Interview data revealed that the college environment critically affected Asian young women's experiences of stress and coping and therefore the college context was a crucial component of this study. Chapter eleven discusses data on the response of the college system to both Asian young women and to their parents. The chapter ends with a case study of Beth (deputy director), which serves to demonstrate the complexities inherent in the relationship between the college systems, the staff and the students. Data from the research field and diary notes is included in the analysis.

Figure 11.1 (using NVIVO, QSR, 1999) illustrates the themes that emerged concerning the college context.

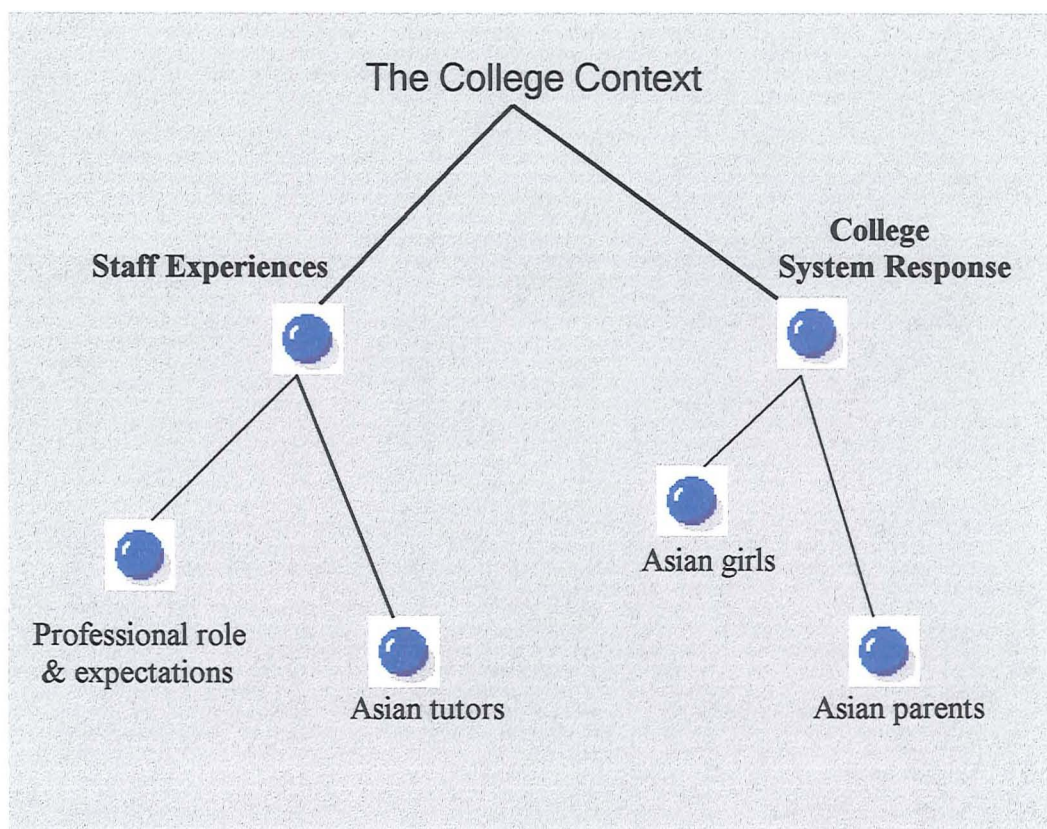


Figure 11.1 Graphic Model of Emergent Themes: The College Context

The College System Response

This study did not set out to examine the nature of staff stress and coping, and indeed the 'prompt' questions put during the interviews did not ask about personal experiences. However, it soon became clear that the teachers' personal circumstances and experiences had far-reaching effects upon the students at Piper College, including Asian young women. It became increasingly obvious that in order to present the full picture, with the Asian girl's experience of stress and coping at the centre, it would be imperative that teachers' voices were heard also. The staff interviews revealed the college context to be even more complex than first appeared, with the experiences of students and staff being intricately interwoven.

The College System Response to Asian Young Women

Several members of staff described the support system operating at Piper College. Generally, where a teacher is concerned about a student because of emotional or academic issues, the form tutor would be informed. If the problem was not resolved the student would be referred to a senior tutor. Following discussion with the student, measures would be put in place to ameliorate the situation. This might include sending memos to all staff who come into contact with the student, to ensure that they are aware of the situation. Where there are apparent emotional difficulties, a student would be referred to the college counsellor (a non-Asian female) or given the details of the Asian counsellor who offers group sessions. The difficulties might also be discussed with the educational psychologist, who makes routine fortnightly visits. Where there are learning support issues, the support staff would also be involved.

Comments made by college staff during the interviews indicate that the 'category' of difficulty determines whether a student is either supported by the pastoral care system or offered academic or study skills guidance. Where there are issues about attendance and completing coursework, tutors would discuss the

situation with the student. If, after a trial period, the student continues to fail to complete coursework and/or does not attend college on a regular basis, disciplinary measures are taken. Thus, the response of the college system to student difficulties is entirely dependent upon how the difficulty is perceived by college staff. A student may face disciplinary measures or be given substantial pastoral or learning support.

The pastoral and learning support team regularly referred students to Alice (college counsellor) and Lynn (educational psychologist), both of whom were white females. Nasma (student counsellor) worked from an external Asian agency and, although she made regular visits to the college to take group and individual sessions, her service worked on a self-referral basis. Ann (learning support) explained that Asian girls often 'had to be encouraged' to telephone Nasma for an appointment. Beth (deputy director) pointed out that the majority of students referred to Alice for counselling were Asian females. Lynn commented that most of the referrals she received concerned issues about learning or examination dispensations. (As the educational psychologist for Piper College I had worked one day a week and met students with both pastoral and learning needs. The work had since been divided between the counsellor and EP, with the result that the educational psychologist was perceived by the college system as primarily serving those with learning difficulties, for example, assessing dyslexic students or giving advice on study skills.)

Lynn commented that, on one occasion, she had sent a memo to tutors about an Asian young woman who was having difficulties in completing coursework. One tutor had returned the memo with the following directions for the girl:

"In order to pass the course, you must be allowed to go out, to watch TV, go on college trips and go to the cinema."

Lynn reflected,

"It is so much about results."

The fact that the girl would almost certainly not be able to follow his instructions seemed to be of little concern to this particular tutor. The curriculum requirements were seen to take priority over any cultural concerns.

Hilary (senior tutor) gave an example of the difficulties inherent in the college curriculum itself. As an English literature teacher, Hilary was uncomfortable about presenting poetry about the killing of animals, since she felt that 'it wasn't in line' with some religious beliefs. She also said that Shakespeare had to be taught with some care as there are 'many associations about black is bad' to be found within the text. She went on to say,

"You just try to make apologies for it before it happens. You try to justify it all the time."

It seemed to her that the formal college curriculum had to be followed at all costs, despite often inappropriate material and cultural insensitivities.

Often, initial referrals to the pastoral system are made at a point of crisis. Kish (vice principal for pastoral care) felt that, had some difficulties been 'talked about much earlier', situations would not become as critical. Tom (head of faculty for learning support) also thought that crisis management was an undesirable method of dealing with problems. He put it,

"It is preventing these kinds of things (emotional difficulties) becoming a problem, so that you don't add to the stress and the trauma that these girls experience."

Tom added that, by the time staff became aware of Asian girls' emotional difficulties, the young women had often become very depressed. In his view, Asian girls were often directed to student services and senior tutors as an automatic response but that

"Despite the philosophy of the organisation, it is only going to be as good as the individuals who run it."

Kish noted that senior tutors spend a large amount of their time in counselling because they are the first to receive referrals. He suggested that if they 'passed down their skills to tutors', there would be a 'wider spread of responsibility'. It seemed that, at the end of the 'referral line', there were relatively few members of staff responsible for providing ongoing pastoral support.

In the opinion of Beth (deputy director), young women with lower levels of ability were often better supported, since the learning support department had ongoing systems to help. Thus, those who had designated *special educational*

needs would be more likely to have their progress reviewed and receive long-term support. One senior tutor, Lisa, pointed out that students on vocational courses were also more likely to receive consistent and ongoing help from their tutor, since the course structure required a relatively small teaching team. Asian young women taking A-level subjects would have to relate to a number of tutors during the week, resulting in fewer opportunities to develop working relationships with teachers.

Abdul (Asian subject tutor) voiced his doubts about the efficacy, and ability, of the college system to meet the specific needs of Asian young women where they were facing 'identity difficulties'. He said,

"I think it is hard for college pastoral systems to pick that (identity issues) up, let alone pick it up and cope with it."

Abdul continued,

"The college tries very hard to adopt a very caring attitude, but I don't think they can deal with cultural differentiation among Asians."

He went on to suggest that the most appropriate way of meeting such needs would be in providing 'group conciliation', led by an Asian woman. However, Nasma (student counsellor) admitted that in providing this service she was able to 'understand but not always able to help'.

In her work as a support teacher, Ann felt that, although she was able to provide support, there were many Asian girls whose difficulties might never be recognized. Furthermore, even where they were referred to the pastoral system, the 'procedure business' had to be followed. Abdul commented that a tutor might get involved, as he put it, 'at the wrong level'. The procedures of the system would be most likely to 'lock in' to academic issues, if an Asian young woman was perhaps failing her coursework. Abdul explained,

"Where a tutor is not able to relate to the specific problems of Asian girls, then you're not going to find out what's wrong with them."

The picture painted by tutors created an image of an inexorable college system relentless in its pursuit of academic achievement. Hilary (senior tutor) put it,

"If they don't attend lessons fairly regularly, they can't hope to succeed, however bright they think they are. We will be as flexible as we possibly

can but you have to be in your lessons and submit your work. They have to give it their best shot. If they don't do the work, even if they have mega problems, it is very difficult to support them for long. We have this strict disciplinary procedure, although we can't get rid of them immediately."

Lisa (senior tutor) pointed out that some tutors tended to regard the student as 'being on a bit of a skive'. Lisa felt reticent to provide 'intimate details' for fear of breaking confidentiality promised to the student. She said,

"It often comes across as just family problems and staff say, 'Oh yes, family problems, heard it all before... an excuse'. But underneath there are actually some horrendous problems."

Tom described how students walked a knife-edge between being perceived as having 'legitimate' emotional or learning needs and being seen as failing to comply with college requirements. He gave the following example:

"A girl who had enormous problems was nearly tipped out of college, until information came to say the psychiatrist thought that the most important issue for her was that she continues to come to college. Because she fell below attendance ranks, she nearly got pulled out until we picked it up... that was a system failure."

Tom went on to say that many tutors focus solely upon their teaching and that, in his view, they are 'very frightened' about 'these kinds of issues' and about 'looking at things in a slightly more flexible, open-minded way'. As head of faculty for learning support, Tom has teachers come to him to discuss the work-related difficulties that some Asian young women seem to be encountering. In Tom's view, the teachers themselves exacerbated the girls' problems. He put it,

"I mean, if they just had an awareness of how they (teachers) are constantly, constantly acting. Ironically, they are constantly adding (to the problem), fuelling it, putting petrol on, without even understanding what they are doing."

Tom concluded that the unwillingness to embrace the issues amounted to a 'kind of institutional racism', with 'a lack of awareness of the human condition outside their own life experience'. He said he found some teachers' approaches to Asian young women as shocking, in that their methods were 'just not going to work'.

Tom spoke with some emotion when he said,

"I think there are people who really ought to be brought into line by those at the top... in terms of what is acceptable and what is not... and to change the culture (of the college)."

Tom emphasized that the staff seemed to be 'tuned in' to low-achieving students but spoke of the hurdles he encountered when trying to get his ideas taken seriously and put on the management agenda. As head of learning support, Tom was making every effort to ensure that the wider aspects of *special educational needs* were recognized, including emotional needs. He spoke about the hierarchical atmosphere of the college and the action he had to take. Tom explained that, since he was 'lower down the pecking order', there was a 'constant paper-chase'. He continued,

"Constant meetings and slow... I do a lot of lobbying behind the scenes before I even try to present my ideas. You have to take all that slowly back to the top before you get a real decision."

Tom explained that one of the 'hurdles' to be overcome was the 'chase, chase, chase of referral procedures'. He felt that some tutors 'pride themselves' on following procedures to the letter, rather than trying to understand the 'cultural baggage' that students face.

The learning support team had clearly made excellent progress since the department had received several national awards in recognition of the high quality of their work. The pastoral and learning support team had ensured that all tutors had completed elementary training in how to guide a student through both academic and pastoral issues. However, several tutors obviously felt that the college system was heavily biased in favour of ensuring academic success, sometimes at the expense of investing time in pastoral care. Iqbal (Asian male subject tutor) put it,

"The college doesn't really do enough ... in recognizing, supporting the whole group of students. There's no real cross-college flagging of these things."

The College System Response to Asian Parents

The issue of college liaison with parents raised contrasting views. Kish (vice principal for staff development, pastoral care, community links) had found Asian parents to be 'very, very responsive'. He commented,

"Asian parents are always in if you need them."

However, Janice (subject teacher) said that Asian parents 'don't come to parents' evenings'. She added, 'at least not to my parents' evenings'. Lisa, another white, female tutor, also spoke about her difficulties in trying to discuss student progress with Asian parents. She explained that when she wanted to communicate with them, in many cases the girls had not passed on the letter of invitation. In Lisa's opinion, it was likely that many Asian young women were fearful of their parents learning too much about their college lives, in case their progress and behaviour in college was perceived negatively.

Kish had also observed Asian girls' concern about information being passed to their parents. He described how two Asian girls had begged him not to inform their parents after being involved in a water fight. Kish realised that the implications for the girls would be far-reaching and more serious than the incident itself, and felt that he needed to be sensitive to cultural differences in parental responses. Kish also spoke about the necessity to reassure fathers when their daughters stayed away from home during field trips. He told how one parent had insisted that a female member of staff should be present, that no boys were to be in the vicinity and at no time should girls be left without an adult presence. Although Kish may have disagreed with the necessity for such measures, he recognised the importance of reassuring the girl's father about his daughter's safety.

Iqbal (Asian male tutor) felt that the college was not prepared to challenge parents' views, even where staff felt that parental demands were unacceptable. Iqbal surmised that the college managers were concerned that Asian girls would not be allowed to attend college and therefore 'intake numbers might drop'.

Several tutors said that, although they gave priority to the needs of Asian girls, rather than their parents, they recognized that cultural awareness and sensitivity was essential when liaising with home. Non-Asian tutors discussed their concerns about their communications with Asian parents. Beth (deputy director) mentioned that some topics had to be handled with extreme care when teachers liaised with Asian parents; for example, talk of 'relationships with boys' could have far-reaching effects. Beth went on to say,

"This puts them (teachers) in a difficult situation because they treat them (Asian girls) as they would all the other students or they have to take the risk (of parental concern). It's quite a fine judgement in each case".

Staff Experiences of Stress and Coping

Asian Tutors

The comments of the Asian tutors and the Asian counsellor indicated that they regarded themselves to be in a unique position in the college. There were over 100 members of staff at Piper College, and only five were of Asian origin. Many Asian students assumed that the Asian tutors were able to understand the difficulties that Asian young people encountered in a Western society. Other teachers often presumed that the Asian tutors 'knew all the answers' when it came to interpreting cultural differences. The Asian members of staff recognized the positive aspects of their role yet they also spoke about the additional pressures that were placed upon them.

Iram (subject tutor) was aware that she appeared to be independent, reinforced by the fact that she remained unmarried. Iram clearly held strong views about control and independence issues. She put it,

"I tell them (Asian girls) I am not having an arranged marriage and I start going into it... I don't want to be passed on... the controlling situation. They won't listen to what I say... they can't understand. One girl said, 'Don't you want to wear a beautiful sari?' and I said, 'Yes, but not in a

context where I am being pushed or shoved from one to another, like I'm being passed on and controlled.'

Iram found it difficult not to voice her feelings yet she did not want Asian young women to become anxious as a result of her comments. Iqbal (subject tutor and support teacher) was also unmarried and did not consider himself to be a Muslim. Iram and Iqbal were happy to provide space for Asian girls to discuss their difficulties (resulting in their having additional responsibility in their roles as tutors) and were aware that they had to respond with sensitivity and care.

The Asian tutors recognized that they were in a unique position regarding Asian students, and felt also that they represented Asian culture for the rest of the staff. Iqbal said that he 'welcomed' this role and was very willing to discuss cultural issues and differences with other teachers.

Professional Role and Expectations

All college staff interviewed held strong views about expectations regarding their professional roles. Caroline (senior tutor) described the ever-increasing workloads and responsibilities that many tutors were subjected to. Teachers at Piper College had recently been on strike over pay and conditions of work. Prior to the strike a local newspaper had carried an item with the heading: *Fury Over Teachers' Hours* (Hewit, 1998). The article stated:

'Teachers at Piper College are again considering strike action, after claims that the management are refusing to negotiate properly amid claims of unfair working conditions...the management have decided to extend the college day without consulting them (teachers). ' (Page 1)

Caroline explained,

"The college is chaotic. You know people are over-worked. I personally had ten days migraine and had gone through the roof. I am not prepared to carry on working like that. Then, as a result of that, I gave a couple of students (Asian girls) short thrift and I never do that. You know it is not their fault. By and large people are more than willing... everybody wants to be a nice guy. We all want to be nice... we all want to help other people if we can. I just think people run out of juice."

Caroline spoke about 'forgetting to write things down' and failing to keep appointments. She explained that she worked on college marketing for four days each week as well as trying to carry out her role as senior tutor. She said that she had reached a 'critical point', which had left her bereft of 'emotional space for students' and continued:

"I think some people want to be perceptive but when people are stressed they can't afford to be perceptive."

Kish (vice principal) was responsible for staff development, pastoral care, community and business links. He commented,

"It's a bloody joke isn't it? I think it (the system) is designed to break down or fail somewhere."

Linda (curriculum manager for careers) told how her weekly teaching load had risen from 11 to 13 hours and how she had been allocated a tutor group and additional supervisory duties. Linda was finding it increasingly difficult to fit in time to interview students, which was a crucial part of her job. She said,

"I certainly feel I have lost some of the contact with students."

Many teachers felt totally unable to fulfil their job requirements in the given time frame. Janice, who was teaching her core subject for 21 hours each week, explained that she had been given a co-ordinating role that had previously been executed by three different tutors. Janice said, despairingly,

"All extra hours and no extra money!"

Added to these pressures were constant demands for teachers to ensure that *minimum grades* were achieved, with *performance indicators* and *targets* being ever-present forces. Beth (deputy director) expressed her concerns about staff being under additional pressure to out-perform each other. She said,

"Some people (tutors) are scared of minimum grades because it can be used as a management tool... you can pull one class out and see one specific teacher had tons of value and this one didn't."

The college environment was presented as competitive for staff, as well as students, with the increasing focus upon academic outcomes.

Issues were raised about how staff perceived pastoral needs and to what extent offering emotional support should be part of the teacher's role. Given the already extensive duties of most teachers, pastoral care was often perceived to be additional to official responsibilities. Lisa (senior tutor) felt that much of the pastoral support was 'a token effort'. She explained that several teachers had been asked to take a tutor group, the aim of which was to provide opportunities for students to raise their concerns. Lisa said,

"People are being told to do it. The good-will that there used to be has gone completely, so there is a lot of reluctance from people who are not directly involved. It has just been another hour on their time-table that they would rather be without."

As a consequence, Lisa thought that students received inconsistent levels of support since some tutors were 'absolutely brilliant' and knew their pupils 'as individuals', whilst others provided few opportunities for discussion.

Tom (head of learning support) described senior tutors who, in his opinion, had not 'moved on' in their thinking from when Piper College had been a senior high school for boys, and who therefore saw little relevance in offering emotional support. Tom said that he was embroiled in a constant struggle to ensure that meeting emotional needs was seen as part of the college duty to provide 'inclusive education'. Indeed, when a new college principal had been appointed, Tom had had to provide a strong argument for allocating a large part of the budget to pastoral care. Tom felt that attempts had been made to 'lower the status' of his position. He explained,

"I think there is a lot of support about the work we do from the people at the top. But, what it doesn't have is one person at the highest levels of management saying, 'I am really embracing this as the central issue for the college'. Widening participation and raising achievement would follow from just that one concept of inclusive learning".

Tom went on to say that, if he pursued the issue and tried to ensure that all staff embraced 'inclusive education', including elements of pastoral care, he would be perceived as having his own 'empire agenda'. Tom described the processes and procedures to be gone through before issues that he deemed to be important were acted upon by the college hierarchical system. He spoke of 'constant paper-

chases, meetings' and 'lobbying behind the scenes' in order to ensure that aspects of inclusive education were taken seriously. Tom spoke about how any request had to be presented in a formal paper to his line manager, after which it would be taken to the senior management team. This process, Tom explained, could take the 'best part of several months', whereas he wanted to say, "I am telling you, trust me, we need more staffing".

Teachers' comments indicated that, in their opinion, many members of staff did not perceive Asian young women's pastoral needs to be of particular relevance in the overall scheme. The college system was more concerned with ensuring academic success and in competing with market forces. Issues concerning *minimum grades, performance indicators* and *targets* overshadowed Tom's vision of inclusive education. Pastoral care issues for Asian young women were unlikely to be placed high on the administrative and management agenda. Where tutors took the time to address pastoral needs, they found their efforts to be unappreciated by the college management system and that, in doing so, they had stretched their own coping resources to the limit. Beth's story illustrates this point.

Case Study: Beth's Story

Beth had taken up her appointment as deputy director some four years before this study. As the educational psychologist for Piper College, I had worked closely with Beth. I knew her to be highly efficient, relentlessly hardworking and genuinely concerned with meeting the needs of students. Her job remit included responsibility for recruitment, guidance and support, as well as head of student services. In addition, Beth was a senior teacher in the English department: she oversaw all aspects of pastoral care and spent much of her time liaising with staff. Each week, Beth had organised my EP agenda and ensured that she had spoken to the relevant tutors and the students themselves. During the research interviews, the Asian girls had frequently spoken about Beth's caring and

sympathetic approach towards them. They felt that she would always make time for them. Beth was able to ensure that the college communication systems included ways of informing teachers about student difficulties as they arose. In short, Beth went to any lengths to successfully complete all aspects of her role.

During Beth's employment at Piper College, her role seemed to be continually expanding. Having started out with special responsibility for student services and pastoral care, over time she was expected to take on many other aspects of college management. I had watched helplessly as she seemed to be drowning under the pressure of work. We discussed, on several occasions, how she might renegotiate her role with John, her line manager (a male tutor who had been at Piper College for many years). During one of our discussions, Beth carefully listed the priorities of her job and the aspects that seemed to be beyond her remit; she also included an action plan as to how the college system might take on her extra duties. After a sleepless night, Beth approached John to discuss the issues. He appeared to listen before making it clear that she was expected to carry out all aspects of her role, as before. Beth's professional approach to her work made it impossible for her to let any aspect of her work 'slide'.

She found her situation untenable and, a year later, my research diary recorded the following:

'Beth told me that she has handed in her notice: she is overworked and overstretched. She feels she has no time for her family, often working all weekends and sitting up until midnight every weeknight... never feeling on top of things. Such a tragedy for the college. She has struggled with this for too long. The college may lose all the staff that devote themselves to pastoral work: it's not cost effective, it's not seen and there's too much of it.'

The following term, Beth took a part-time teaching post in the English department and was given the stock cupboard for her base room. At the end of the academic year, Beth left Piper College for a full-time senior post in a secondary school.

Beth's story serves to illustrate the nature of the current climate in a college where performance indicators and academic results are given priority. In striving

to offer students emotional as well as academic support, whilst carrying out her ever-increasing, multi-faceted job requirements, Beth reached a point of total exhaustion. Shain (2000) and Whitehead (1999) suggest that the FE environment has been 'remasculinised' in favour of a 'thrusting' entrepreneurialism, thereby creating a competitive 'boys own culture' (Kerfoot and Whitehead, 1998, page, 437). Shain maintains that women are not exempt from this culture but have to adopt a masculine approach if they wish to succeed. Beth's discussions with John about her role echo Shain's findings that macho style bullying is central to many FE environments. Shain suggests that tensions between 'hard' and 'soft' versions of new managerialism arise as attempts are made to balance the emotional needs of individuals with the need to 'get things done'.

Asian young women at Piper College undoubtedly benefited from Beth's commitment, sympathy and professional support but at what cost to Beth herself? Her work addressing the pastoral needs of the students did not have measurable outcomes. Unlike the visibility of student retention reports or academic records, time spent in listening to stressed and anxious students was all but invisible to Beth's colleagues. This study found that not only were the needs of Asian girls invisible to the college system but also the efforts made to help them went unseen. Beth's departure took away one crucial source of emotional support for Asian girls at Piper College. Her story indicates the close connection between the experiences of Asian young women at Piper College and the experiences of college staff. The demands of the 'college machine' are potentially damaging to staff and students alike.

Discussion

Several tutors implied that, for the college, equal *opportunities* was more about working towards academic success for all students rather than establishing a learning environment that promoted emotional stability and high self-esteem. The interview data revealed that many tutors are aware of ever-present tensions between the need to ensure academic success for all and the need to provide

appropriate, sensitive and effective pastoral support. Tutors' comments add strength to Green and Lucas' (1999) argument that the FEFC's funding mechanism is diminishing the quality of learning. Like the lecturers in Randle and Brady's (1997) study, staff at Piper College were of the opinion that the college management's push for academic excellence was divorced from many of the educational values shared by the teachers.

Pastoral support for emotional needs and mental ill health seemed to be outside the collective values of the management system, and fell to a handful of staff for whom such issues were of grave importance. The Asian girls themselves felt that tutors had little time for listening, in contrast to some of their experiences at secondary school where relationships had been developed over time. Beth's story graphically illustrates that, where the hard-edged managerial approach gave way to more humanistic priorities, the college system was unsympathetic. As Corbett (1997) suggests, where needs are seen to be neither cost-effective nor observable, they do not easily fit into the 'special educational needs package'. Many teachers felt ill-equipped when dealing with pastoral issues and several thought that colleagues would deem such topics to be outside their professional remit. Tutors' comments reflect Hurst's (1999a) view that many teachers feel they are lacking the requisite skills needed to work with those having mental health difficulties, and echoed Rees' (1995) opinion that FE colleges are failing to address emotional and behavioural difficulties in a formalised way. The growing number of teaching hours and fewer spaces for individual student contact time has literally squeezed pastoral care into the corridors.

Overwhelming time pressures combined with competing tensions inherent in the college system, resulted in many teachers experiencing high levels of personal stress and anxiety. Many tutors found it almost impossible to fulfil their job requirements, as well as they wished, given the additional pressures of the college environment. These findings mirror those of Stead et al. (1995) and McDonald and Lucas (2001).

The interview data revealed that where tutors had been given increasing responsibility and were expected to carry out additional roles, they felt they were

under enormous pressure to perform and prove their capability against all odds. This seemed to be especially so for those in positions of middle and senior management. Teachers' experiences of stress in college seemed to be inextricably bound up with taking on extra responsibilities without having the necessary extra time in which to complete tasks. The teachers' strike reflected their frustrations at being under-valued and seemingly unappreciated. To them, their salaries were in no way commensurate with the pressures and realities of their jobs. As the McDonald and Lucas (2001) study also found, the bureaucratic demands of the FE system and lack of opportunities for professional development resulted in low teacher morale.

Against such a backdrop, there appeared to be slim chance that pastoral care for Asian young women would be perceived as imperative. Many teachers, by their own admittance, were unable to devote time to listening to, or supporting, emotional needs. Since Asian young women's pastoral needs were all but invisible, the chances of them receiving appropriate help seemed remote.

PART FIVE

Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

The final two chapters of the study present a theoretical analysis of the findings, followed by a discussion of conclusions, implications and recommendations.

Chapter 12 outlines the analytical model and conceptual framework upon which the study was based and **Chapter 13** suggests three original contributions to knowledge. The thesis ends by discussing recommendations for the future as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the project.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Analysis of Findings: The Conceptual Framework

Introduction

The analytical model presented in this chapter (summarised in figure 12.1) attempts to address the research questions by offering a conceptual matrix in which to locate the profusion of responses and interpretations about the nature of Asian young women's experiences of stress and coping within the context of Piper College.

The analytical model is used for the following reasons: it provides a framework that encompasses the complexities and subtleties found within the data; it reflects the theoretical models that were presented in the literature review; and it includes elements from the historical and social contexts of Asian young women. Whilst the theories themselves are attributed to their authors, their positioning within the framework, of low to moderate to high levels of stress, is my own attempt to highlight the relevance of the theories in the context of the Asian young women in this study.

Data Analysis: The Model

As the literature review revealed, Asian young women in the UK are in a unique position, which necessitates a unique way of attempting to understand the essence of their lives. As the data collection progressed, a way of understanding Asian girls' experiences seemed to present itself. The model in this study does

not purport to provide a definitive way of analysing and understanding the data; rather it presents a structural starting point. The analytical model does not suggest that any girl represented a 'neat fit' into a category. It attempts to provide a framework for gaining a more general understanding or 'feel' for what her life might be like, in terms of stress and how she coped. As the girls talked it became increasingly clear that a stereotypical view of 'Asian girl as victim' was not helpful. It was essential that any model to be used for analysis had to reflect, in some way, the enormous extremes, complexities and subtleties that the girls expressed, whilst taking into account what is already known about the development of identity status and ethnicity in adolescence.

The analytical model (figure 12.1) was also used in an attempt to continue and extend the emancipatory approach. For the emancipatory approach to have credibility as a legitimate research method, it needs to be applied to the data analysis. With this in mind, it is crucial that the girls' voices are heard within the text. That is, their experiences should be expressed in their own words. Data reduction and analysis inevitably brings with it the bias of the researcher. It is the researcher who chooses what to include and what to leave out, and it is the researcher who then shapes the data, suggests interpretations and gives opinions. This is necessary if any shape at all is to be given to the multiple and extensive amounts of data that come from research. As with other qualitative methods, the emancipatory approach used here accepts responsibility for the researcher's interpretive role. As Strauss and Corbin (1998) put it, it is not

“...sufficient merely to report or give voice to the viewpoints of the people, groups, or organisations studied. Researchers assume the further responsibility of interpreting what is observed, heard or read.” (Page 160)

If the girls' voices are to be heard without judgement and the emancipatory approach is to be extended to the analysis, there comes a dilemma as to how the data is to be analysed if it is to be more than merely transcribed text. It might be that, as the emancipatory approach is taken forward, those researched will have a part to play in controlling the analysis but, for now, some type of model and structure has to be imposed upon the data by the researcher.

	Low Stress	Moderate Stress	High Stress
Identity Status: (Marcia, 1994)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity Achievement • Foreclosure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity Diffusion • Moratorium • Foreclosure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity Diffusion • Moratorium
Ethnic Identity: (Berry, 1994)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separation • Integration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bi-cultural Integration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assimilation • Marginalisation
Cultural Orientation: (Triandis, 1994)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collectivistic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collectivistic / Individualistic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualistic
Adolescent Development: (Coleman, 1978)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active role in addressing single or few inter-personal issues 	↔	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to address complex & multi-interpersonal issues
Coping Strategies: (Breakwell, 1986): (Lazarus & Folkman, 1980): (Seiffge-Krenke, 1995):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective e.g. • Compartmentalization • Emotion-focused • Active coping &/or internal coping 	↔	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-effectual e.g. • Withdrawal / Isolation

Figure 12.1 ANALYTICAL MODEL: Stress Levels in Relation to Identity Status, Ethnic Identity, Cultural Orientation, Adolescent Development and Coping Strategies.

The primary intention of the analysis was to ensure that no voice was dismissed simply because it did not seem to fit within the analytical model, or reflect stereotypical or mainstreams views. It is important, therefore, that the reader is able to listen to the voices and believe what they say. This study is about trying to understand what life might be like for Asian girls in a college of further education. It is about describing a repertoire of experiences and expressions that reflect in some way the enormous reservoir of possibilities. The model for

analysis was drawn up as the data collection progressed, with the final analytical model being completed after the last voice was heard.

As the literature review indicated, the term 'stress' is problematic since there are various definitions and understandings of the 'condition'. However, the model used in this study is based upon Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) definition, which focuses upon the interaction between the person and the environment, and upon individual differences in perceptions of the same or similar events. Whilst providing the 'best fit' to the study, Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) approach did not seem to encompass all that the young women were expressing and, therefore, I attempted to develop a model that presented a unique framework (figure 12.1), including representation of differing levels of experienced stress.

Part four of the thesis addressed the research questions and hypothesis by referring directly to the interview data. The analytical model attempts to move the study on to more complex questions that require an in-depth study of traditional theories and previous research. This study does not purport to present full answers, merely to add extra dimensions to current debates. The five parts of the analytical model will be taken in turn. These are: identity status, ethnic identity, cultural orientation, adolescent development and coping strategies.

Identity Status

Whilst the methodological approach of this study did not use the traditional instruments to ascertain identity status (for example, the use of semi-structured interviews and an accompanying rating manual, Marcia, 1994), nevertheless, the qualitative data did appear to confirm Marcia's (1994) assertions in the following ways: individuals are more likely to be stressed and anxious when they are actively exploring values and beliefs (*moratorium*) or where they have not made a commitment to a belief system (*identity diffusion*); individuals are less likely to experience interpersonal conflict when they do not question the ascribed views of parents or significant others (*foreclosure*); and individuals are more likely to

perform well under stress when they have made firm commitments to beliefs and self-constructed values (*identity achievement*).

Figure 12.2 summarises Marcia's theoretical approach as it relates to stress levels experienced by the Asian young women.

	Low Stress	Moderate Stress	High Stress
Identity Status: (Marcia, 1994)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity Achievement • Foreclosure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity Diffusion • Moratorium • Foreclosure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity Diffusion • Moratorium

Figure 12.2 Analytical Model: Stress Levels in Relation to Marcia's Model of 'Identity Status'

This study found that complications arose where Asian young women had to respond simultaneously to the differing contexts of home and college, each representing different cultural value systems. Marcia's theoretical framework implies that the ideal status is where an individual has actively explored all options and made a commitment. Marcia's theory suggests that *identity achievement* is the preferred status and implies that the status of *foreclosure* is less than desirable and somewhat immature. Ghuman (1999) asserts that *foreclosure* mirrors the identity status of many first generation Asians in the UK, and indeed, many Asian girls in this study indicated that they had taken on the value systems of their parents. However, the studies of Kraus and Mitzscherlich (1995) and Archer and Waterman (1990) provide support for an apparently new form of *diffusion* that differs from the more typical apathetic and commitment-avoiding *diffusion* in being strategic and adaptive. Cote (1996) maintains that both *identity diffusion* and *foreclosure* are becoming a 'culturally adaptive' form of identity. Furthermore, as Cote (1996) and Stephen et al. (1992) suggest, the process of identity development does not necessarily reach a final point, rather it

moves in a cyclical pattern of exploration and achievement, making for a more fluid process.

It cannot be assumed that, because many Asian young women adopt the cultural belief system of their parents, they have not considered other options.

Furthermore, what does 'actively explore' mean? Should they 'try out' Western values and act as if they hold dissimilar views to their parents, before making a decision?

It may be that *identity achievement* in an Asian cultural setting would involve an individual being able to acknowledge and understand the complexities inherent in the collectivistic family and community; and, rather than feel controlled, being able to perceive the positive role that they play within the system. Westernised notions of *identity achievement* require the individual to achieve psychological independence, whereas it may be that in *collectivistic* settings, the individual is able to achieve a sense of pride in taking up their role in a mutually supportive environment.

Whilst much has been written about the development of identity status from a Western Euro-centric viewpoint, there is little cross-cultural exploration of the identity issues of adolescents from widely different cultures (Goossens and Phinney, 1996). Erikson (1968) and Marcia's (1966, 1980) seminal work on identity status focuses upon internal psychological perspectives and tends to ignore the complexities of the contexts in which identity formation takes place. Yoder (2000) emphasises that there may be external socio-cultural influences, or *barriers* that limit individual development options.

It was evident from the interview data that the influences of the college environment and experiences of the staff had significant impact upon the stress and coping experiences of Asian young women, and thus their identity development. This study does not claim to present an alternative theory of identity development; however, it does hope to build on recent papers (for example, see the special issue of *Journal of Adolescence*, edited by Phinney and Goossens, 1996; Yoder, 2000). Although the empirical findings of my research

may not be applicable in other contexts, the comments of the Asian girls indicated that Western notions of identity development might not be valid in settings of cultural diversity, especially where the development of ethnic identity is integral to the progression into adulthood. The discussion will now turn to issues concerning ethnicity and acculturation.

Ethnic Identity

Figure 12.3 represents the Asian young women's experiences of stress, in relation to Berry's (1994) model of ethnic identity and acculturation. The interviews revealed that most Asian girls experienced moderate levels of stress as they endeavoured to fuse, or alternate between, the two cultures of home and college. This supports Phinney and Devich-Navarro's (1997) suggestion that Berry's (1990, 1994) model requires elaboration in order to take into account the variation in ethnic and mainstream involvement within minority groups, and confirms the relevance of their more complex bi-cultural model.

The data analysis did not reveal any evidence of Asian girls who identified solely with their own ethnic group (*separation*), not surprisingly, since their attendance at Piper College indicated a degree of integration into Western society. However, several young women demonstrated a strong bond with their Asian culture and were vocal about rejecting Western values; many of these girls described their daily lives as being relatively stress-free. These findings support Shaw's (1988) comments that many Asian adolescents find significant advantages in fulfilling their role within the family and community.

Only one Asian girl (Amina, case study one) described stress and coping experiences that indicated *assimilation* had taken place. Amina had taken steps to reject her home culture, for example, by leaving home, and demonstrated high levels of anxiety and stress. Amina's story reflects the findings of Ellis (1991) and Archer (1996), who found that the Asian girls who became most Westernised, experienced more difficulties. Apart from the evidence of Amina's

case, this study is unable to add to the main body of findings about the psychological adjustment of individuals who are *assimilated* or *separated*. It is important to note that Eyou et al. (2000) maintain that the results of research in this specific area remain inconsistent.

	Low Stress	Moderate Stress	High Stress
Ethnic Identity: (Berry, 1994)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separation • Integration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bi-cultural Integration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assimilation • Marginalisation

Figure 12.3 Analytical Model: Stress Levels in Relation to Berry's Model of Ethnic Identity

This study found evidence to support Rattansi and Pheonix (1997), who suggest that a 'hybridisation' of identity is likely, as elements of contrasting cultures are 'mixed and matched'. The research results also confirmed Ghuman's (1999) review of findings (for example, Modood et al. 1997; Hutnik, 1991; Ghuman, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997) which indicate that the majority of Asian young people prefer an integration mode of adaptation. The Asian young women's accounts of their everyday lives implied that they experience moderate stress as they try to balance and respond to the expectations of home and college, confirming Rattansi and Pheonix' view that integration is not necessarily a smooth process. The data analysis also confirmed that conflict between Asian girls and their parents often focused upon the extent to which integration takes place (Coleman and Hendry, 1999; Gilani, 1995).

It may be that this is an apposite time to suggest alternative theories of identity development that acknowledge culturally diverse value systems. As Ghuman (2000) asserts, Berry's (1994) model,

“...places the onus for acculturation on the minority groups and completely ignores the attitudes of the dominant group.” (Page 307)

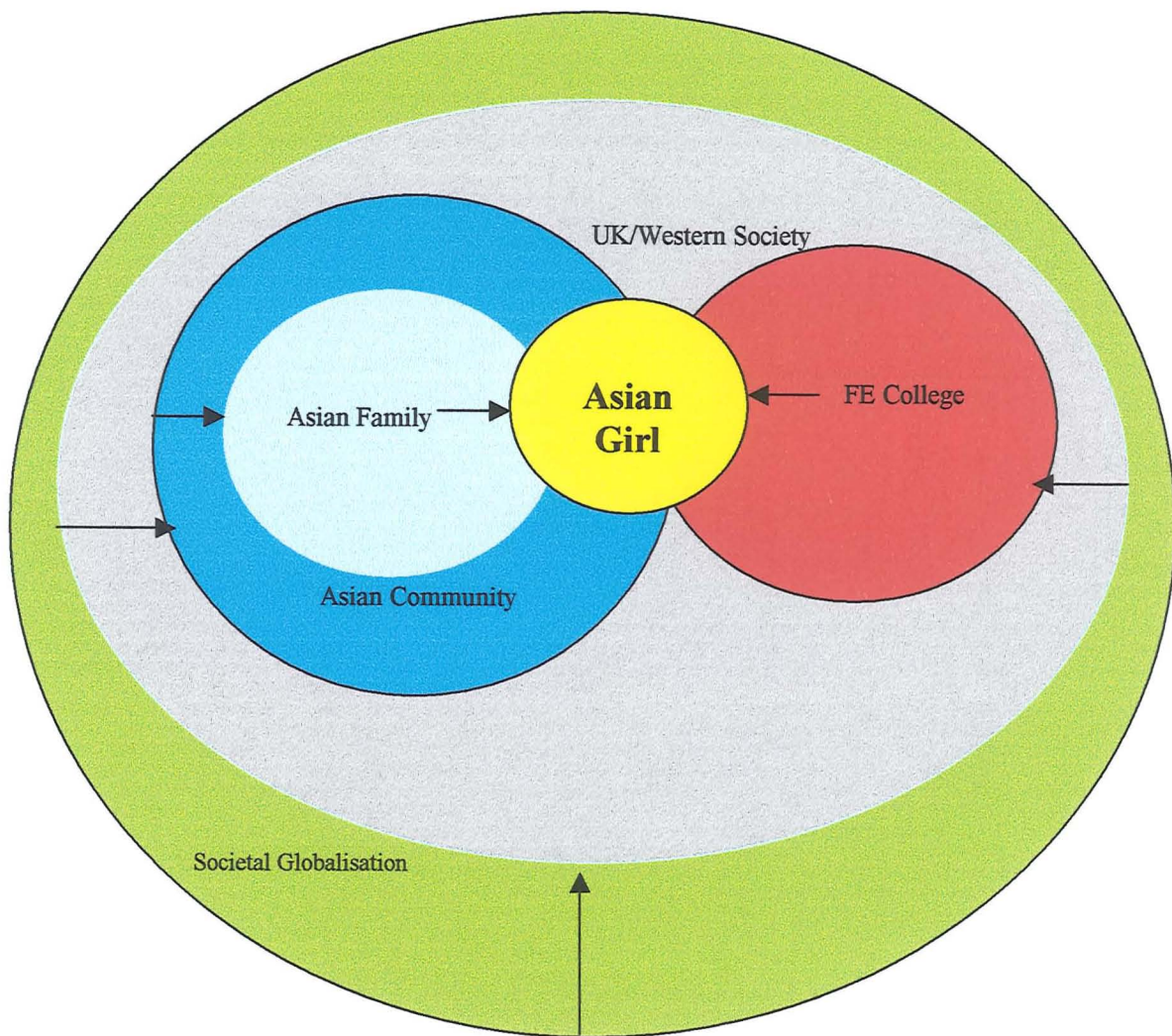
Cultural Orientation

The interview data mirrored Shaw's (1989) and Anwar's (1998) findings that parent-child tensions focused upon a clash of values about the Asian daughter's role, the importance of family honour (*izzat*) and the collectivistic values of the family and community (*bradari*). The data also confirmed Talbani and Hasanali's (2000) conclusions that Asian girls find it difficult to negotiate between cultural control and individual freedom. Triandis' (1994) does not suggest that one orientation creates more tension and stress than the other; rather he focuses upon the importance of context. Figure 12.4 (below) places the girls' experiences of stress in Triandis' framework of cultural orientation. It indicates that the girls who felt they were part of a *collectivistic* group, appeared to experience less anxiety and tensions than those who were striving to be *individualistic*.

	Low Stress	Moderate Stress	High Stress
Cultural Orientation: (Triandis, 1994)	• Collectivistic	• Collectivistic/ Individualistic	• Individualistic

Figure 12.4 Analytical Model: Stress Levels in Relation to Triandis' Model of 'Collectivism and Individualism'

In figure 12.5 I attempt to place the Asian girl in context and illustrate the competing tensions that she has to contend with. The model depicts the Asian young woman at the centre of globalisation, Western society, the college environment, the larger Asian community in the UK and her family. She is placed as the connection between her family and community, and the FE college within UK society. This model shows the Asian girl as having both an 'insider' role and an 'outsider' role in each setting.



Key:

- = Focus upon: *izzat* (family honour) - collectivistic
- = Focus upon *bradari* (extended kinship group) - collectivistic
- = Focus upon independence & academic success - individualistic
- = Focus upon competitive market forces – individualistic
- = Focus upon global market forces – individualistic

Figure 12.5 The Asian Girl in Context: Competing Tensions

Western value systems view independence as a desirable trait and, as Haw and Hanifa (1998) reflect, the educational process invites adolescents to think and act

for themselves. Western notions of identity development acknowledge that 'storm and stress' are not necessarily prerequisites for *identity achievement* (Coleman and Hendry, 1990; 1999) but, in striving for *individualistic* values and beliefs, adolescents are likely to encounter some degree of psychological turbulence (Petersen and Ebata, 1987; Siddique and D'Arcy, 1984; Earls, 1986). Independence also appears to be a prerequisite to achieving a mature identity. This notion is, therefore, in direct opposition to the *collectivistic* sense of identity in Asian families and communities.

Grotevant and Cooper (1986) propose that a balance between individuation and connectedness is a prerequisite for healthy family relationships. However, as Gilani (1999) indicates, Asian homes and communities regard separateness and self-assertion in Asian girls as contrary to the expectations of the *bradari*. Although Triandis' (1995) model makes important distinctions between *collectivistic* and *individualistic* value systems, it seems that the time is right to question, as Gilani does, the definition of individuality in a collectivist, social environment. However, as the demands of competitive market forces gather pace, dominant Western notions of the importance of *individualistic* values play an increasingly influential role in the FE setting.

Adolescent Development

The analytical and conceptual framework attempts to address the question of why there appear to be significant differences between the stress and coping experiences of Asian young women. Coleman's (1978) *focal model* offers insights into the complexities inherent in the process of development for Asian adolescent girls. He suggests that issues or relationships reach a peak at different stages in development, that an issue is not necessarily resolved before the next one is tackled and that the model does not assume fixed stages or sequences.

Figure 12.6 (below) places the girls' experiences in the context of Coleman's model. It illustrates that, when Asian young women felt they had few interpersonal issues to deal with at any one time, they described their daily lives as relatively stress-free. In contrast, where there were complex and multiple issues, the girls felt over-whelmed and highly anxious. The responses of non-Asian young women indicated that they perceive themselves to be dealing with far fewer issues than are Asian girls. These results mirrored Simmons and Blyth's (1987) findings that, where an individual was dealing with multiple and complex interpersonal issues, they were more likely to experience stress and anxiety.


	Low Stress	Moderate Stress	High Stress
Adolescent Development – Focal Model: (Coleman, 1978):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active role in addressing single or few inter-personal issues 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inability to address complex & multi inter-personal issues

Figure 12.6 Analytical Model: Stress Levels in Relation to Coleman's Focal Model of Adolescent Development

Ghuman (1999) maintains that Asian young people's experiences of challenges and problems are similar to, or the same as, their white peers'. In this study, Asian young women, like their non-Asian peers, were concerned with issues about independence and future plans. However, during the interviews, it became evident that they face additional complexities. The Asian girls focused upon their role, including their responsibility to maintain family honour, relationships with boys, how they conducted themselves outside the home, their thoughts about marriage (arranged or otherwise), academic achievement and careers. All of these issues were over-arching the two widely differing cultural contexts of home and college and indicate that the Asian girls dealt with many more pertinent issues than the non-Asian girls.

Coleman's (1978) focal model suggests that young people manage their transition into adulthood by choosing to deal with one issue at a time. That is, adolescents have some control over the process and they are not simply subjected to environmental factors. Asian girls are undoubtedly able to control some factors, for example, by choosing to complete their education before contemplating marriage; however, the intricacies of responding to two cultural settings with opposing values systems places them in a position where they are almost certain to have to deal with multiple issues.

The picture emerges, then, of Asian young women who become highly skilled in dealing with several issues at once, often by the use of well-honed coping strategies. The discussion will now explore some of the differences between the coping strategies of Asian girls who appear to experience few stressors, and those who are highly anxious.

Coping Strategies

Westernised theories of coping (for example, Folkman and Lazarus, 1980) propose that individuals use problem-focused and/or emotion-focused methods to deal with stress. The individual's perception of their difficulties are all important in determining whether or not they have the personal resources to handle the demands (Monat and Lazarus, 1991). Removal of turbulence and the restoration of equilibrium are deemed to be central to coping (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1993), nevertheless 'doing something about the problem' is traditionally viewed as paramount to successful coping.

This study revealed that Asian young women are often prevented from using problem-focused approaches, since the two value systems of home and college are completely incompatible. The girls demonstrated high levels of skill in accommodating to their concerns and described how they adapted to the *collectivistic* values of home, whilst simultaneously ensuring that they respond

appropriately to the individualistic and academically competitive environment of college. However, tutors' remarks indicated that the college system views *problem-focused* coping as the preferred strategy, the implication being that *emotion-focused* coping is somehow dysfunctional.

Frydenberg (1997) suggests that *non-productive* and passive coping strategies are generally associated with dysfunction and an inability to cope and, although historically there has been no judgement, there is a tendency to assume that being unable to solve the problem implies inadequacy and failure. Frydenberg maintains that an individual using *non-productive* coping behaviour may worry, invest in close friends, seek to belong to a group, use wishful thinking, reflect that they often have no way of dealing with problems, use emotional release as a way of reducing tension, ignore the problem, use self-blame and have a tendency to isolate themselves. However, while the problem may remain unsolved, these responses may, in themselves, be beneficial. The Asian young women's responses in this research project indicated that the use of passive, *emotion-focused* strategies were highly successful at minimizing stress and anxiety. Where girls referred to each other for mutual support, they drew upon *collectivistic* principles, since a primary function of the family and community *bradari* is to ensure that they look after each other. This invisible and often quiet mutual support is very different to Western strategies of pushing for individualistic problem-solving, radical change and results.

In established theories of coping, much is made of *primary appraisal*, determining what is at stake, and *secondary appraisal*, determining what can be done (Lazarus 1968; Folkman et al., 1986). When coping theories are applied to multi-cultural contexts, there are a myriad of complexities. As Berry (1997) points out *acculturation* goes beyond individual differences. The arguments continue (see for example, Berry's lead article, 1997, accompanied by the responses of eminent theorists, for example, Lazarus, 1997) yet, essentially, coping strategies are seen as active or passive (Diaz-Guerrero, 1979). The data from this study shows that the Asian girls use *non-productive* coping styles more often than non-Asian young women. The term itself implies that 'nothing productive' occurs, that is, the problem is not solved. However, because there is

no explicit, observable change, it does not necessarily mean that the girls are not productive in other ways.

Figure 12.7 uses prevalent theorists' views (Folkman and Lazarus, 1980; Seiffge-Krenke, 1995; Breakwell, 1986) to indicate a continuum of coping strategies, from most effective to least effective. Most Asian young women, who experienced low to moderate levels of stress, skilfully used an intricate mix of coping strategies and were continually supported by close friendship groups.

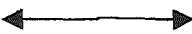
	Low Stress	Moderate stress	High Stress
Coping Strategies: Breakwell, 1986: Lazarus & Folkman, 1980: Seiffge-Krenke:	Effective e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compartmentalization • Emotion-focused • Active Coping &/or Internal Coping 	Moderately effective 	Non-effectual e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawal/ Isolation

Figure 12.7 Analytical Model: Stress Levels in Relation to Breakwell, Lazarus & Folkman, and Seiffge-Krenke's Models of Coping.

This study confirms Ghuman's (1994) view that Asian young people learn to separate situations in their minds. Indeed, they have become so adept at Breakwell's (1986) notion of *compartmentalization*, that there is little chance of those outside the close, mutually supportive friendships of Asian girls being able either to know when there are concerns, or to provide appropriate support. The coping strategies that many Asian young women employ do, indeed, mask any difficulties that they may be experiencing. Although Asian girls do not attempt to reconcile seemingly impossible differences between home and college, it seems that they have negotiated their way with dexterity and skill and, in choosing each other for emotional support, they have adopted the best possible coping strategy for their survival and success.

Although Amina's case study adds strength to the studies highlighting the vulnerability of Asian young women (Kingsbury, 1994; Merrill and Owens, 1986; Biswas, 1990; Glover, 1989) the interview data revealed that the majority of Asian girls are successfully managing multiple issues as they arise at home and at college. Amina differed from her Asian peers in that she found herself to be isolated and marginalized.

The majority of Asian young women in this study demonstrated that their *collectivistic* values of mutual support did not produce stagnant, ineffective and passive coping; rather the girls were actively engaged in adapting to, and shaping, their environment by offering an alternative to the macho, problem-solving response to everyday issues.

The picture that emerged, as the Asian young women began to speak, was multifaceted, sensitive and far removed from the stereotypical notion of 'Asian woman as victim' so often presented in the media. The analytical model presented here uses well-established theories to set the scene for the presentation of my own model in chapter thirteen, which attempts to establish a positive framework that reflects the intricate and fluid nature of the everyday lives of Asian young women at Piper College. This study does not purport to have 'got it right', but an attempt has been made to listen.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter presents three aspects of the study that endeavour to make modest but original contributions to knowledge. They are: alternative approaches to theory; contributions to the emancipatory methodological paradigm; and fresh insights into the experiences of stress and coping of Asian young woman in a further education setting. Chapter thirteen then suggests implications for those working in the FE sector and makes recommendations for the future. Finally, the limitations of the study are discussed before possibilities for future research are put forward.

Original Contributions to Knowledge

The topic of Asian children and young people, growing up in Western societies, has become an issue for the twenty-first century. Second and third generation Asian adolescents are experiencing UK society in ever-changing ways. In generations to come, the fluidity of cultural contexts will have moved elsewhere, but, for now, researchers have focused upon a unique phenomenon. The growing interest in this area of study is evident from the number of publications that have arisen in the last few years. Ghuman (1999), Haw (1998), Bhatti (1999) and Shain (2002) have ably presented important issues for this unique population. This study examines Asian females' adolescent experience by exploring elements of gender, ethnicity and pastoral care in the setting of a further education college. In doing so, the traditional theoretical models of adolescent ethnic identity development are called into question and a new descriptive

lexicon is suggested. The invisibility, and potential vulnerability, of Asian young women called for a sensitive and reflexive approach. To this end, the principles of emancipatory research were adapted as a way to approach difficult issues without causing damage, and to attempt to give something back by allowing the girls to 'give voice'. As a result, this study found unexpected and enlightening aspects of Asian girls' experiences that challenged Western stereotypical notions. Three unique aspects of the study will now be discussed in turn.

Towards an Alternative Theoretical Approach

The interactional model of stress put forward by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) is particularly pertinent to Asian young women, since the model emphasises the interaction between the individual and her environment, the complexity of situational variables, including her own unique characteristics, and appraisal of the situation. The data from this study demonstrated that Asian young women have multiple and complex issues to deal with as they interact with bi-cultural environments. Stress is a complex concept, with ethnicity and gender adding further dimensions. For Asian young women in this study, the development of ethnic identity was central to the stress and coping process. It seemed that Asian girls' appraisal of situations and interactions with their environment was inextricably linked to how they perceived themselves and their ethnic identity in the two settings of home and college. This study set out to focus upon the nature of Asian young women's stress and coping, and their discussions about stressful experiences clearly centred upon the tensions involved in identity development and the pull between collectivism and individualism.

Traditional theoretical models relating to identity status (for example, Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980, 1994), and the development of ethnic identity (for example, Berry, 1990, 1994), have made impressive contributions to the understanding of how individuals develop a sense of self. There has been much debate amongst leading theorists about the place of individual differences and contextual factors,

as well as discussion about what constitutes adolescent stress, followed by theorising about methods of coping. Such theories were apposite to their social and historical settings. Recently, more elaborate constructs of the complexities found within multi-ethnic societies have been offered (for example, Phinney and Devich-Nevarro, 1997; Rattansi and Pheonix, 1997). However, as multiple identities arise in the pluralistic twenty-first century, the effects of globalisation are taking root.

Moving towards adulthood in the twenty-first century means developing the capacity to live with complexity. We cannot assume that theoretical constructs about adolescent development, that have stood us in good stead until now, remain wholly applicable. Adolescents are enveloped in social settings that reflect multiple value systems, which often represent opposing ideologies. Adolescent development is far more sophisticated, intricate and complex in societies where globalisation has removed traditional barriers. The time is ripe for fresh approaches, new insights and increased receptivity. The academic world is beginning to respond to the need for a heightened awareness of adolescent development in pluralistic, multi-ethnic societies. Examples include the following: Phinney and Goossens (1996), who emphasize the need to explore contextual factors in identity research; Ghuman (2000), who discusses the shortcomings of theoretical models that do not take into account the effects of attitude in the dominant group upon the acculturation process; and Gilani (1999), who questions the definition of individuality in a collectivist social environment. Phinney and Goossens conclude,

“Individuals develop not only in interpersonal and community contexts, but also in historical and cultural contexts that are likely to be even harder for psychologists to study... empirical findings validated in one era and culture may not apply to another.” (Page 494)

The modest nature of this study does not provide scope for challenging dominant and long-held theories on the nature of adolescent development, stress and coping. However, in endeavouring to continue the emancipatory theme, this study attempts to respond to the lessons learned from the young women, by reflecting the intricate complexities and subtleties of their everyday lives in some

sort of theoretical context. If Asian girls are viewed in the light of current theory, where individualistic notions of success override positive aspects of collectivistic values, stereotypical notions of 'Asian girl as victim' are likely to survive. The girls gave me new insights into my own previously held convictions about what constitutes 'healthy adolescent development', and it is to those insights that this discussion will now turn.

It seems that the time is right for the development of a new lexicon when discussing adolescent development, stress and coping in multi-cultural settings. Moves have been made towards accepting that theoretical models might be viewed in a new light, for example, the description of *identity diffusion* and *foreclosure* as *culturally adaptive* (Cote, 1996). However, it no longer seems realistic to assume that individuals develop single identities, or that maturity and *identity achievement* is about moving towards firm commitments. As Woollett et al. (1994) suggest, ethnicity and ethnic identity are not homogenous categories; rather, cultural identifications should be conceptualised as 'multiple, fluid and contextually embedded' (Woollett and Marshall, 2001, page 42). Woollett and Marshall's (2001) arguments mirror my own when they point out that the hybridity of Asian women's ethnic identity poses challenges to traditional models that assume identification is static and self-contained.

Rather than focusing upon the extent to which an adolescent is moving towards independence, it may be necessary to examine, for example, the extent to which an Asian girl is able to straddle the two worlds of home and Western society, whilst retaining family roles and values that enrich her life. As Rattansi and Pheonix (1997) point out, conventional identity research has frequently focused upon the individualisation of young people's identities and has failed to

"...grasp the multiplicity, fluidity and context-dependent operation of youth identities and identifications." (Page 121)

Western models of identity development (for example, Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980) seem somewhat patronising and colonial and appear to suggest, 'you are not a proper adult unless you become independent from your parents and family

and take up a position in the workplace'. Rather than perceive the 'crisis' as being centred in the individual, it may be more helpful to examine the 'crises' that are occurring in society, as exemplified by recent race riots between Asian and white youths in Oldham, Manchester (June, 2001) and the global crisis and response to the Muslim world in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center (USA, September 11th, 2001).

The worlds that Asian young women inhabit may present insoluble dilemmas and paradoxical scenarios. If, as Seiffge-Krenke (1995) and Frydenberg (1997) maintain, a sense of personal control is critical in the coping process, then Asian young women, who are faced with external situations that are beyond their control, are left with no alternative but to adopt coping strategies that maintain psychological equilibrium. In turning to each other, Asian girls are not only continuing the long-established collectivistic principles of mutual support, but they are also instinctively adopting the best possible strategy. If Asian young women were to make firm commitments to any one value system, those representing alternative values would see them as deviant. Foucault's (1975) notion of the 'power of the machine' seems relevant here, since Asian young women are inexorably caught up in the disciplinary powers of two contrasting authorities, home and Western society. In Foucault's terms, the FE context and the college system has been 'normalised' by wider Western society, implying that other identities and contexts are somehow 'abnormal'. The girls' responses indicated that where they felt under pressure from parents and/or teachers to make radical changes to their core constructs (Kelly, 1955) or view of the world, they experienced higher levels of stress.

The Asian young women in this study were able to offer me an alternative way of construing their stress and coping experiences. Rather than focus upon the 'victims', who undoubtedly exist in minority numbers, it seems apposite to reflect upon the positive experiences of Asian young women at Piper College as a way of tentatively suggesting alternative theoretical constructions. In figure 13.1, I attempt to conceptualise the positive *process* of the development of ethnic identity of many Asian girls at Piper College, and highlight the coping strategies that they found to be successful when dealing with stress. The model that I put

forward here focuses upon the aspects of development and coping that seemed to result in low levels of stress and a positive sense of self.

Adolescent Ethnic Identity Process of Asian Young Women:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflexive, interactive process whereby the individual becomes increasingly aware of multiple issues inherent in the cultural contexts of home and Western society (college). • Development of ability to take advantage of the positive aspects of the collectivistic values of home and individualistic values of Western society (college).
Coping Strategies of Asian Young Women:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of ability to address one or few interpersonal issues at any one time. • Development of ability to compartmentalize multiple identities, as appropriate. • Development of emotion-focused coping strategies.

Figure 13.1 **The Adolescent Ethnic Identity Process and Coping Strategies of Asian Young Women**

One important aspect of the suggestions represented in Figure 13.1 is the emphasis upon the fluctuating *process* of identity development, rather than viewing the formation of identity as encompassing fixed stages and possessing static qualities. My own view reflects Hall's (1995) notion that the construction of identity takes place in the process of changing cultural practices and meanings, and where, despite similar origins, 'sameness' cannot ever be assumed.

The Asian girls in this study confirmed Brah's (1994) opinion that many Asian young women are able to occupy multiple positions. The girls ably demonstrated their ability to develop complex identities, in kaleidoscopic environments that exist within the ebb and flow of cultural, societal and historical change. It seems that many Asian young women at Piper College are skilfully developing

reflexive, interactive identities as they become aware of complex and multiple issues embedded within the contexts of their home, college and wider society. Their day-to-day lives are often complicated and finely balanced; yet many are able to take advantages of the positive aspects of the collectivistic values represented at home and the individualistic values promoted at college. That is not to say that the girls' developmental process is without difficulties, but those young women with a positive sense of self are able to enjoy the collectivistic principle of mutual support that they find in friendship with each other. The girls cope by developing a high level of skill and expertise in compartmentalising their lives, in developing an understanding of the multiplicity of cultural issues, and in becoming increasingly aware of which elements of their bi-cultural lives it is beneficial to retain.

The Asian young women in this study confirmed Coleman's (1974) suggestion that many adolescents are *active agents* in managing their contexts and issues. They challenged the stereotype, and revealed high levels of skill as they described their response to the turbulence of the widely differing environments in which they found themselves. This research project also adds strength to Shain's (2002) argument that Asian girls are far from passive, since they play an active role in recreating their identities within the contexts of their home and the wider society.

The Asian young women persuaded me that it was time to put aside my pre-conceived notion that, in order to reach adulthood, all healthy adolescents have to achieve independence, both in their thinking and in their everyday lives. The girls persuaded me that Western notions of identity achievement have little relevance to their everyday lives as they plot their way through the complexities of ethnic identity. They helped me to understand that, where opposing value systems exist within society, problem-solving is not always possible. In any case, if identity development is to be a life-long process, having others 'on your side' may be far more preferable to 'going it alone'. Above all, they left a lasting impression of emotional maturity and skill.

This study attempts to add new aspects to the growing debate about the complex nature of identity development in multi-cultural contexts. It suggests a framework that reflects the issues that arose from the Asian young women's discussion about their stress and coping experiences at Piper College. The framework is one that arose from positive examples of Asian girls who were clearly successful in coping with stress at home and college. It moves away from deficit models and places emphasis upon the *process*, rather than defined stages or points of completion in identity achievement. The model helps to describe how Asian young women at Piper College skilfully work with, adapt and react to their environments, without endangering their sense of well-being and self-esteem.

A Contribution to the Emancipatory Paradigm

As a practicing educational psychologist, Asian young women had previously come to my attention when they had been referred due to dramatic crises or apparent anxiety. In their crises, these girls had been crying out for help. I began the research process with traditional tried and tested methods: quantitative tests and structured interviews. After all, it seemed there was a 'phenomenon' to be tested and exposed, and I was used to a tight, directed, problem-solving approach when it came to unearthing the roots of children and young people's difficulties. Had I followed the route taken during the pilot study, the research results would have been very different. If the pilot results had been replicated in the main study, all Asian young women would have revealed the following features: high levels of stress, as tested by the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983); a range of coping styles used to deal with stressors, as tested by the Adolescent Coping Scale (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1993); and predominant use of non-productive coping strategies. The girls would undoubtedly have been constrained by the questionnaire, since it allowed only a limited and superficial description of their experiences of stress and coping. The problem with this methodological approach was that, because I held a biased view of Asian girls in crisis, I was inevitably asking the wrong questions. The Asian young women knew what the

issues were, which questions to ask each other and how to go beneath the surface of the research process. The experience and insights I gained during the research process persuaded me that, when it comes to excavating peoples' experiences, their feelings, fears and joys, it is best left to the individuals themselves to suggest relevant questions; and it can only be arrogant to assume tests or structured settings will persuade previously unheard voices to speak out. What a relief, then, to find that the girls were highly skilled in listening to each other and were able to give gentle support as they disclosed their views on sensitive issues. This research process seemed to reflect some of the principles of the emancipatory paradigm that had its roots in the disability movement and is now developing within academia (for example Clough and Barton, 1998; Oliver, 1992a).

The emancipatory paradigm joined relatively recently the traditional and long-established methodological research approaches. At its core is the principle of 'giving voice' to those who have traditionally gone unheard. The hypothesis of this study, that Asian young women's pastoral needs are largely invisible within the FE setting, meant that only a sensitive approach would enable voices to be heard. Furthermore, in order to speak out, the speaker must be able to trust her listeners. It was vital to the Asian girls that not only must confidentiality be assured, but also that they were among friends whom they knew would understand and sympathise. As a researcher using the emancipatory approach, I was given the heavy responsibility of listening carefully, making every effort to eliminate my own biases and, most importantly, of reflecting the essence of the girls' reality. As Clandinin and Connelly (1998) put it, the struggle for the research voice is like,

“...a knife edge as one struggles to express one's own voice in the midst of an inquiry designed to capture the participants' experience and represent their voices, all the while attempting to create a research text that will speak to, and reflect upon, the audience's voices.” (Page 172)

In using the emancipatory approach, the researcher must be aware of subjectivity and be ever-ready for criticism from those whom they research. In 'giving voice', I had to release control of the interviews and allow myself to be led on a journey where the destination was unknown. Prior to the study, I held preconceptions

about 'Asian girls as victims' since my experiences as a psychologist had reinforced this notion. However, as the girls encouraged each other to speak and questioned each other more expertly and sensitively than I could ever have hoped to do, my views changed. I had not expected to hear so many happy voices describing the security and comfort of their everyday lives. There were a minority of young women who were distressed and highly anxious but, the more I listened and the less I said, the greater understanding I had of the enormous complexity of many Asian young women's lives. Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory was helpful in enabling me to try to view the world through another's eyes, even if the values expressed were alien to my own. As I listened to the girls' colourful descriptions of their everyday lives, I came to realise that I had to believe what they said, even if it failed to confirm my initial view of 'Asian girl as victim'. The emancipatory approach enables the researcher to celebrate all that is unique, without trying to disempower the researched, or propose alternative ways of construing their experience. By allowing the young women to have some control over the research process, my position of power faded into the background, although it did not disappear altogether.

The term 'emancipatory' implies that the researcher is, in some way, freeing the researched, by allowing them to be part of the process. In this context, it would be arrogant to assume that Asian young women see themselves as oppressed and desperately hoping to be rescued. Emancipatory research may be more about 'freeing' the researcher and allowing her to be released from preconceptions and biases. It may be more about setting the research process free by ensuring that the words of those researched are not placed in pre-conceived categories. The researcher, therefore is released from the analytical intellectual acrobatics of saying 'this is what they said, but this is what they really meant', since it is fundamentally important to believe what is said. This study did little to change the lives of the Asian girls involved; yet the research process did much to radically change not only my views, but also my future professional practice.

What, then, are some of the difficulties of the emancipatory approach? How much control should the researcher relinquish in an effort to reduce the power

relationship? What happens if the whole process is given over to the subjects of research? Won't there be those who have louder voices and those who fail to make themselves heard? Perhaps the researcher's role is to facilitate equal involvement. However, if the subjects of research are involved in data reduction and analysis, they are just as likely to have their own views and biases as the researcher. For example, if Amina (case study one) had taken an active role in selecting which issues were of paramount importance, she may have focused upon her own personal tragedy, confirming the view of 'Asian girl as victim'. Furthermore, the young women who enjoyed the collectivistic environment of home, and described their lives as being relatively stress free, may have described Amina as deviant. Perhaps, at the very least, the researcher could ensure that the subjects agree with what they are purported to have said, as a way of validating the research process. In this study, I decided that, since the transcripts contained comments from a number of girls, confidentiality might have been breached if numerous copies were made. However, in retrospect, the group could simply have been reconvened in order to validate comments.

For me, the greatest challenge in the emancipatory process came in trying to balance my professional role with that of my role as researcher. No doubt ethnographers would say that, in offering counselling, I was altering the environment. Besides, my interventions may not have proved to be helpful. However, if emancipatory research endeavours to be reciprocal, decisions have to be taken as to what, may or may not, be helpful. In Amina's case, my instinct was to help if I could, but college staff might have been less sympathetic than they were to my involvement and Amina's college experience may have been negatively affected instead of improved.

It seems that the very nature of the emancipatory approach not only encourages the researched to be part of the process, but also 'frees up' the research process itself. With freedom comes more chances of getting it wrong, whereas tight and controlled research structures, such as quantitative methodologies, have been subject to rigorous tests of reliability and validity, as well as having measures to establish significance. However, where the principles of the emancipatory paradigm are central to the research process, it seems that the realities of those

researched are more likely to be heard, believed and acted upon; and where 'professionals themselves are learning the art of imaginative listening' (Corbett, 1998) and the ability to empower and encourage voice in those who usually go unheard, it may be that the depth of meaning is of greater significance than more structured, 'safe' approaches.

Whilst this research project did not employ the emancipatory paradigm in its purist form, for example, the girls did not have full control of the research process, it has attempted to draw upon some of its principles. Primarily, efforts were made to put aside the stereotype of the powerful professional and to use imaginative listening (Corbett, 1998) which enabled the Asian girls to be open, trusting and enormously responsive in going below the superficial responses of the pilot questionnaires. This study has made tentative inroads into applying the emancipatory approach in a field other than disability research, which is closely associated with the paradigm, and provides evidence of the effectiveness of the approach when working in contexts where voices are not usually heard. I would suggest that the further education environment is one such context, and the discussion will now move on to examine the relationship between Asian young women and the contextual setting of Piper College.

The Experiences of Stress and Coping of Asian Young Women in a Further Education Context: New Insights

Since the late 1970s there has been a growing body of research (for example, Ballard, 1979; Taylor and Hegarty, 1985; Drury, 1991; Siann and Knox, 1992; Basit, 1996; Modood et al., 1997; Haw and Hanifa, 1998; Ghuman, 1999; Bhatti, 1999; Sharma, 1999; Shain, 2002) that focuses upon the experiences of second and third generation Asian adolescents as they experience the bi-cultural contexts of home and Western society. Although many writers have spoken of the impact of educational contexts, to date there has been little research that specifically focuses upon Asian girls' stress and coping experiences in further education.

This study offers a depth of insight into the day-to-day experiences of young women at an FE college. Although its primary focus was upon the stress and coping experiences of Asian girls, it is the examination of the impact of the FE setting upon the young women that makes this study unique. The uneasy symbiotic relationship of the college system, the tutors and Asian girls creates tensions and dilemmas that have far-reaching effects on all involved.

The distinct political, historical, social and psychological aspects of this study stem from the fact that Asian young women's experiences are likely to change over time as they move into fourth, fifth and sixth generation immigrant populations. Furthermore, the FE context is undergoing radical changes as it moves into the twenty-first century. The data from this study indicated that the market culture of the twenty-first century appears to be in grave danger of overlooking and disregarding the often-invisible needs of Asian young women. This research project was timely in that the ebb and flow of multi-cultural societies within globalisation are likely to take future research in new directions. The results and implications of the study, coming from a single college, can only ever be modest. However, the lessons learned are of some use since wider questions about challenging stereotype, equal opportunities, empowerment and professional responsibility are called into question.

Initially, the research subject was comprised of two strands: Asian young women's experiences and college staff perceptions; however, as the interviews progressed, it became clear that it would be crucially important to examine more general issues that arose from the college context. The discussion will begin by focusing upon implications that came from the study regarding Asian girls, before moving on to discuss the wider implications of staff responses.

Challenging the Stereotype: 'Asian Girl as Victim'.

As Ghuman (1999) asserts, the beliefs, values and social attitudes of most Asian families are very different to those of Western society, and, therefore, the psychological and social development of Asian adolescence is likely to be more

difficult and certainly more complex than other groups. As Thornley and Siann (1991) point out, the media and wider society often portray Asian girls as 'victims' of their families, since it is assumed that girls internalise Western values in opposition to their parents. Ballard (1979) maintains that, given the choice, Asian young women would not simply prefer to be Westerners. Jackson (1997) suggests that it is mistaken and arrogant to assume that young Asian women want to emulate their white peers. Indeed, in some cases, Asian females are somewhat sceptical about Western cultural practises, for example, the notion of romantic love as the starting point of marriage. Furthermore, the well-intentioned Westerner's effort to 'free the oppressed' may, of itself, restrict the Asian woman to a pre-conceived notion of 'freedom'. One Asian girl highlighted this issue during a television production (BBC 2, 2000) when she said,

"In their eagerness to free us they become our oppressors. The more you insist you are not a victim, they say, 'Oh, yes you are. Don't you see? You are!'"

This study found clear examples of Asian young women who were well aware of Western value systems and yet had chosen to utilize and enjoy the benefits of family networks. To some of the girls, Western family systems appeared to result in loneliness and isolation, with little chance of sustained family support. In contrast, many described their parents as being wholly supportive, flexible and willing to take into account their daughters' wishes.

The minority of crises that arise, both at Piper College and in wider society, alert the attention to dramatic and difficult events. I had started the research with the intention of unearthing the roots of the extreme difficulties that I had witnessed Asian young women experiencing, during my practise as an educational psychologist. I would not wish to negate the very real and troubling experiences of some Asian girls under extreme social and cultural pressures. However, I was presented with evidence to suggest that the majority of Asian young women enjoy their unique role in the family and, although there are complicated and multiple issues to deal with, they have become skilled at managing the dual nature of their everyday lives. Asian young women who appear to be deeply depressed and who present para-suicidal symptoms continue to cause me alarm.

The results of my study in no way cancels out, or diminishes, the import of the wealth of literature (for example, Kingsbury, 1994; Merrill and Owens, 1986; Biswas, 1990; Glover et al., 1989; Handy et al., 1991) that demonstrates the psychological vulnerability of many Asian girls. However, the majority of the Asian girls who appeared to cope adequately and with only moderate anxieties, were able to offer insights into how they address complexity and tension inherent in the home and college setting.

Although their lives were not straightforward or stress free, the girls coped admirably well by choosing to deal with single or a few issues at any one time and by seeking support from each other. However, it seemed that the FE environment could be just as threatening as a dominant, controlling family since there was pressure to conform to Western values of independence. There has been much interest in how Asian adolescents cope with their families and communities but only limited discussion about how they cope with Western educational systems (Ghuman, 1999; Haw, 1998; Bhatti, 1999). This study found that, for a minority of Asian girls, they were in danger of becoming a 'victim' of the college system. Amina's story demonstrated how easily the college system could variously label a student with apparent difficulties, as being in need of pastoral care or, alternatively, in need of disciplinary action. The discussion will now turn to the impact of staff and the college system upon the girls' stress and coping experiences.

The Impact of College Staff Experiences upon the Stress and Coping Experiences of Asian Young Women

The interview data implied that tutors tended to presume that all Asian girls face cultural tensions between home and college that lead to some degree of stress. Little mention was made of young women who appear to be stress-free. This supports Sharp and Thompson's (1992) suggestion that teachers use their own understandings of what causes student stress. It may be that the *invisibility* of Asian girls' anxiety and stress results in the presumption that, since all Asian young women appear to display few signs of stress, all Asian women are having

the same sorts of experiences. That is, unless Asian girls are in crisis and show overt signs of distress, it is impossible to know the degree of personal difficulties that are being experienced. This study supported Sharp and Thompson's (1992) point that subtle signs, for example, of lateness or quietness, could be overlooked or misconstrued.

It might be that staff presume that all Asian girls, when faced with the cultural tensions between the *collectivistic* values of home and *individualistic* values of the Westernised college setting, are bound to experience at least moderate anxiety. A minority of teachers indicated that, in their view, an *individualistic*, independent approach is preferable, suggesting that if they were in the same position as Asian girls they would find life extremely stressful. Some teachers assumed that all Asian girls are striving for independence and that those who were not had been indoctrinated into their parents' values. It could be argued that the majority of teachers had been indoctrinated into Western value systems.

The young women themselves were aware that many tutors shunned all advances relating to emotional difficulties, and most were wary of discussing their worries outside their immediate peer group, since they would be likely to receive advice that was either inappropriate or impossible to take. Furthermore, as Bhatti (1999) discovered, where discussion about cultural conflicts occurred between teachers and students, it was likely that the stereotypical view about Asian girls' difficulties would be reinforced. Thus, the girls learned to keep their problems to themselves. It would seem that the invisibility of Asian young women's pastoral needs is, of itself, a coping strategy.

The girls knew precisely which members of staff were readily available to listen to their concerns, although they were not always cognizant of the complex managerial issues that operated within the college context. Furthermore, there was little reward for tutors who took time to respond to Asian girls' pastoral needs and, as Randle and Brady (1997) found in their study of FE, teaching staff felt that management did not share the same professional values. Some teachers felt there was hardly enough time or emotional space to manage the crises, let alone try to uncover invisible needs. The girls perceived the majority of staff to

be primarily concerned with results and some tutors openly stated that they did not want to become involved with pastoral issues.

Tutors' comments confirmed McDonald and Lucas (2001), Kirsch (1994) and Rees' (1995) findings of growing concerns about bureaucratic demands, poor morale and lack of professional development. Teachers indicated that they feel overloaded and stressed as they endeavour to cope with the expanding administrative burden, increased teaching hours, and personal tutoring.

In general, most tutors perceived Asian girls to be victims of cross-cultural tensions, especially when dealing with their families. The lottery scenario, whereby individual staff responses could range from sympathetic support to disciplinary measures, calls into question issues about equal opportunities for all. It seems that the college system overrides individual tutors in its pursuit of academic excellence. The discussion will now explore some of the overarching issues inherent in the college system.

The Impact of the College System upon the Stress and Coping Experiences of Asian Young Women

The responses of the Asian girls and college staff raised three distinct issues concerning the college environment: firstly, the managerial push for results which overrides pastoral concerns; secondly, the arrogant assumptions of post-colonial, Western ideologies that have taken precedence over other, different value systems; and thirdly, the changing conceptualisation of equal opportunities in the FE setting.

The emergence of 'new managerialism' within the FE context has led to focus upon budget, resources, productivity, consumerism and accountability. There has been a change in focus from the 'caring profession' towards value for money in the market place. Teachers' comments reflected those of Green and Lucas (1999) who maintain that the quality of FE learning is being marginalized by financial issues.

The data from this study mirrors Burrage and Stewart's (1990) research where teachers were found to be anxious about the decline of the professional role. The tutors implied that the management did not place pastoral care on a par with academic success, and even where teachers were willing and able to respond to emotional needs, there was little recognition or reward since the college system was preoccupied with academic success and the market place. The passion involved in promoting academic success does not always allow for flexibility and sensitivity to the constant flux of the student population and college environment. Where students are seen as commodities, there is little time for seeking out those with emotional difficulties. Most tutors at Piper College were aware that the system did not provide adequate emotional support for Asian girls. Like Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) many teachers felt there to be an economy of 'student worth', made worse by the large chasm between management policies and the real lives of the young people.

Dee (1999) suggests that the diminishing amount of direct contact that teachers have with students inhibits dialogue and understanding. As Kennedy (FEFC, 1997) maintained in her committee report, students have to be confident enough to seek out support for themselves. Even where staff offer help, emotions are likely to take time, and the problem-solving, action plan orientation of the college system does not tend to view emotional support as cost-effective. The outcome of counselling, for example, where a student is happier, is hardly likely to figure in analytical reports. Staff are being asked to be accountable and profit making in a competitive market place, but have none of the resources of the private sector. Furthermore, where people are stressed, dissatisfied and feel under-valued, their capacity for caring is likely to be blunted. Piper College is no exception since the college managerial system is forced to keep pace. In doing so many members of staff have found it nigh on impossible to support pastoral needs, let alone those that are invisible.

If the FE environment is unbending in its pursuit of academic excellence, the space and time to listen to quiet voices is either minimal, or lost. If overlying the system is the assumption that 'we have the answers, we know what is best for you', then those who hold conflicting values and beliefs are likely to feel

diminished and ignored. The Asian girls at Piper College were unlikely to seek pastoral guidance but if, in a crisis, they asked for help they could be in danger of being viewed as deviant for not conforming to Western values. As Pheonix (1997) points out, minority groups are often seen as 'strange' or deficient and therefore they are reluctant to seek help. If and when they do seek help, it is important that staff find time to listen. As Johnstone and Hurst (1991) put it when speaking of the disabled, responding to their needs does not mean entering in to the patronising position of 'champion'. Corbett (1989) further suggests that empowerment does not mean guiding the individual into what the powerful professional thinks is best. If empowerment in Corbett's (1998) terms was extended to Asian young women, the girls would be enabled to develop their skills and confidence as a way of ensuring that their ideas are effectively communicated. If the Asian girls and their families feel that they are in an environment where they are expected to conform to Western notions of success, they may feel that their views would be disregarded. Even where schools and colleges stress neutrality and proclaim 'there is no racism here', they may be denying that different cultural identities exist. Furthermore, the girls and their families may feel mystified by complicated 'professional' language. Surely the FE setting must be constantly re-evaluating not only its marketability, but also whether the students themselves feel they get their needs met.

It seems that Tomlinson's (FEFC, 1996) call for FE to respond to the individual learner's requirements are in danger of being drowned out by the demands of institutional success. As Oliver maintains (1992b), differences must not be seen as deficits. Whilst the FE college is taking its place in the market place, the central issue of inclusive education is moving down the list of priorities. The 1980s concept of equal opportunity for all is too costly in a market culture. As Tom (head of learning support) explained, in order to get issues about special educational needs and inclusivity placed on the college agenda, he has to lobby and push to be heard. He put it,

"If inclusive learning was embraced as the central issue for the college, then all the other things, like widening participation and raising achievement... would follow."

Tom's views echo those of Dee (1999) who emphasises the centrality of leadership in moving organisations towards inclusive education. Dee suggests that managers have to choose between a range of competing priorities and that full commitment to inclusive learning will only be achieved with the strong steer of the FEFC funding methodology and curriculum framework.

In focusing upon Asian girls at Piper College, one aspect of inclusive education is illuminated. The complexities involved in enabling those with vastly different values to achieve success in their own right, whilst receiving appropriate and sensitive pastoral support, make for an enormously difficult task. For Amina (case study one), the college system so nearly failed her because of its definition of special educational needs and criteria for who it includes in its response to individual needs. By locating the deficit in Amina, the institution so very nearly avoided its responsibilities. Should the institution 'treat everyone the same' as Hilary suggested, or is it time to respond to diversity, listen to unfamiliar voices and empower all those involved, as Barton (1998) emphasises? Many of the Asian young women in this study celebrated their uniqueness, whilst at the same time having to defend their right to be different to the so-called 'normal' FE student. The testimonies of the girls with 'special needs labels' indicated that Ann's recognition and support of their individual needs ensured that their college experiences were positive. In contrast, Amina's story demonstrates the shortcomings of an *inclusive* system that merely tolerates difference on the road to 'treating everyone the same'. These stories challenge inclusion 'purists' (for example Booth, 1991) and support Oliver's (1992b) call for celebration of difference. If the individual is not to be blamed for her predicament, then Tomlinson's plea, for the college itself to take responsibility, should be taken seriously.

Corbett's (2001) discussion regarding equity and entitlement is helpful here. She stresses the need for equitable value systems to demonstrate respect for differences, and calls for professionals to be humble, listen carefully and to offer mutual respect to all concerned. The comments of teachers indicated that there was a pull between help that students were entitled to, for example, learning support, and help that was regarded by some as being of little relevance to the

academic process, for example, pastoral care. Those students with statements of special educational need are entitled to support from the system, whereas young women with emotional needs are reliant upon the goodwill of tutors. That is, there is no framework for recognition of Asian girls' emotional needs, and since they lack the label of entitlement they miss out on their fair share of resources.

It seems to me that there is a growing need for the importance of FE contexts not only to be recognised, but also for those within the college setting to take on responsibilities of learning from, and responding to, those who do not fit the Westernised framework. Transition from adolescence into adulthood is, as Yoder (2000) suggests, a socially embedded as well as a psychological process, and influences in the FE environment may form *barriers*. Worse still, any difficulties that arise may be centred in the Asian young women themselves. Rather than being a one-way street, surely inclusive education should allow for an osmotic process whereby the Asian girls are encouraged to make cultural contributions to the FE environment. The next section will explore possible ways forward, and will include the views of the Asian girls themselves.

Implications and Recommendations for Those Working in Further Education

An attempt was made to follow the emancipatory paradigm throughout the research process. To that end, the Asian young women were asked, after the interviews, what support Piper College could usefully offer them. The response was unanimous: the girls wanted 'to be listened to'. Rehana spoke for many when she said,

"We need more talking, more chances to get your point across."

Prabia and Shahana felt that teachers should take more interest in their lives by asking questions and listening to their answers. Sofia and Nasma wanted staff to be more aware of cultural differences to enable them to understand the pressures

that many Asian girls face. Fatima suggested that students should be given the time and space to listen to each other, perhaps with a trained student counsellor to act as facilitator. She thought that a female close to her own age, although not necessarily of Asian origin, would best fit the role.

The girls' responses reflect the views of Barton (1998a) who stresses the need to listen to unfamiliar voices. He puts it,

"The question of listening is a particularly important issue when applied to individuals and groups who have had their voice marginalized... Through a sustained commitment to listening, mutual self-respect and dignity can be built up and trust established." (Page 85)

There is a need for the FE system, and those operating within it, to adopt a philosophical unity that promotes self-knowledge and setting aside value judgements, as a first step towards understanding cultural differences. This approach supports Pheonix' (1997) view about the importance of understanding racisms as social processes, and echoes Corbett's (1998) call for professionals to lay aside their own egos, judgements and professional responses. At the heart of 'active listening' is a cultural sensitivity that continually questions the dominance of cultural imperialism, and our own inherited identities and, as Thomas (2000) suggests, works towards a culture sensitive pedagogy, improved knowledge of other cultures and an ability to be reflective.

When the FE college is itself placed in an environment of competition in the market place, there is little time for the management system to stop and reflect upon its philosophical perspectives. Furthermore, as Corbett (1998) suggests, it is very difficult to challenge patterns of behaviour that are caught up in the momentum of the system itself. However, there are some practical measures that may be taken.

Firstly, staff awareness training seems to be imperative in any reflective processes. As Rouse and Florian (1992) and Dee (1999) indicate, staff development is central to the promotion of inclusive education. Raising the complex issues that the girls discussed in this study would be a helpful starting point. The young women themselves could best express the cultural differences,

tensions and difficulties experienced, including those created by the college environment. A case study approach, where staff are invited to listen to Asian girls telling them 'how it is', would be one way of offering a range of views and opinions. Positive examples of successful coping could be presented as a way of offsetting stereotypical notions of 'Asian girl as victim'.

Secondly, raising the profile of inclusive education and the role of pastoral care throughout the entire college system would go some way towards pre-empting crisis management for Asian young women. In addressing the need for all staff to listen, rather than be continually pushing for academic success, Asian girls might be more inclined to speak before a crisis occurred. As Hurst (1999a) points out when discussing policy and provision for disabled students in higher education, solutions are long term since they involve institutional commitment in terms of time and money. Hurst (1999b) suggests that the challenge is to ensure that responsibilities are shared and accepted by Faculty, administration, and specialists. He adds that

“...only by achieving this will it become the reality that services and support... moves from being an optional/welfare activity to something which is core and ...in which everyone is involved.” (Page 13)

The provision of finance, space and time for staff training may, in the current climate, prove to be impossible. It seems that wider political and societal changes are necessary before such changes might be implemented.

Thirdly, policy makers could regularly review anti-racist guidelines and staff recruitment issues to ensure that mission statements and practice took into consideration the needs of the college population. For example, it would be essential to reflect the ethnic and gender mix of the students in staff recruitment. It would also be important to include non-teaching staff (for example reception personnel and student welfare officers) in such considerations, since the responses of the Asian girls in this study demonstrated the crucial role that they play in the provision of informal support. Recruitment of key student/home liaison teachers, to be assigned to each pupil at the start of a course, might encourage the active and positive involvement of the family, creating further opportunities for issues concerning cultural differences and needs to be

discussed. Where outside agencies are invited to join the college system, it would be vital to ensure that they were also involved in reflective practice and cultural awareness training. Other policy considerations that Ghuman (1999) suggests, include ensuring that due recognition is given to ethnic minority languages.

Fourthly, it would be helpful if educational psychologists working in the FE sector ensured that they moved away from the deficit model and, where possible, become involved in collaborative staff training. Yoder's (2000) proposal, that the concept of *barriers* be used as a diagnostic tool, would also enable the psychologist to move away from deficit models. Educational psychologists should pay heed to the collective and cohesive nature of the Asian family (Dwivedi and Varma, 1996) and ensure that, where possible, communication with family members occurs in the home language (Kumar, 1988). Educational psychologists might be involved in work that promotes effective home/college links by encouraging increased openness with parents. It may be that home language discussion groups could be offered, to ensure that families are given the opportunity to discuss their views without being subjected to judgemental opinions.

Lastly, the Asian young women themselves might be given the time and space in which to discuss their views, difficulties and successes with their peers. As the girls indicated, a timetabled space could enable peer support groups to share concerns and successes. It might be that, as Ghuman (1994) and Gibson (1988) proposed, the US model of trained student counsellors, from similar religious and cultural backgrounds, would be best placed to offer appropriate facilitation for support groups. Other practical ways to support Asian girls and their families have been suggested by Basit (1996), Ullah (1998), and Siann and Knox (1992) and involve effective liaison between the home and educational setting.

It is significant that the majority of recommendations arising from this study involve the college staff and the college system. It has been argued that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for many Asian girls to change the circumstances in which they find themselves. However, I would not wish to underestimate the possibility of Asian young women using their considerable

skills to bring about change. As Barton and Armstrong (1999) point out, the illusion of rationality and purpose that emanates from government policy makers is disempowering

“...because it confuses perceptions about the possibility and necessity of individuals, groups and local communities bringing about change through their own actions.”(Page 262)

It is vital that all those working with Asian young women examine their working policies and practices in order to ensure that the voice of the Asian girl is heard and her needs are made more visible.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

When thorny questions about *validity*, *generalizability* and *reliability* were applied to this study, the answers seemed to infer multiple limitations. What a relief then, to find Harry Wolcott's (1994) response to these issues. This section will notionally explore the questions in relation to the study, before turning to Wolcott's alternative conceptualisation about seeking, and rejecting, validity in qualitative research.

Traditionally, these terms have been applied to the quantitative arena and are used as scientific measures to establish credibility. Janesick (1998) suggests that *validity* in qualitative research is concerned with description, explanation and credibility. That is, you are observing and identifying what you say you are. *Generalizability* is about the extent to which you can make wider claims based on your research, rather than be confined to the idiosyncrasies of one study, and *reliability* concerns the accuracy of the research methods and techniques used, traditionally tested in quantitative settings by *test – retest* and *standardization* (Mason, 1996). Such terms come from a *positivistic* stance that requires all scientific research, both quantitative and qualitative, to be subjected to the same evaluative measures.

Strong arguments have been put forward by those who suggest that it is time to question the usefulness of such terms in the qualitative paradigm (for example, Jansick, 1998; Donmoyer, 1990; Wolcott, 1990, 1994). Jansick argues that qualitative research is about uncovering the 'meanings of events in individuals' lives'. She continues,

"Being immersed in a study requires passion: passion for people, passion for communication, and passion for understanding people... Now it is time to return to a discourse on the personal, on what it means to be alive." (Page 51)

Wolcott (1990) argues for understanding the absurdity of validity when he suggests that there is no single 'correct' interpretation. To strengthen his argument, Wolcott (1994) quotes Geertz (1973) when explaining that the deeper cultural analysis goes 'the less complete it is'. Geertz puts it,

"It is a strange science whose most telling assertions are its most tremulously based, in which to get somewhere with the matter at hand is to intensify the suspicion ... that you are not quite getting it right." (Page 29)

However, in order to identify limitations and to ensure that any piece of research is rigorous, it is necessary to evaluate it in some way. Wolcott (1994, pages 347 – 356) offers nine points as an alternative way of showing validity. His framework will be applied to this study in an attempt at evaluation.

1. Talk Little, Listen a Lot

Wolcott speaks about establishing a good social rapport, and becoming more attentive and responsive. This approach was central to my research work and, like Wolcott, I often asked for repetition or clarification by summarising and asking if I had 'understood things correctly'. Undoubtedly, I did not always '*understand* things correctly'; even where the girls said I had summarised accurately.

2. Record Accurately

In tape recording the interviews, I attempted to avoid my own memory failure or selective reinterpretation. However, since I was trying to give my full attention I chose not to take notes, which meant that I had no record of facial expression or gesture.

3. Begin Writing Early

Wolcott (1990, 1994) suggests that qualitative researchers benefit from writing before, and during, the whole research process, and from reviewing after completion of fieldwork. I kept a careful diary during the research process but, upon reflection, it would have been better to record my initial assumptions about what I thought I might find, as a way of tracking my own conceptual development.

4. Let Readers “See” for Themselves

Wolcott’s suggestion of including significant amounts of primary data was of great importance in my analysis. The drawback was that the length of the thesis was hard to keep under control. However, by following the emancipatory paradigm, I endeavoured to let the girls ‘speak for themselves’. The inclusion of the staff views, standardised tests, information from college records and my own field diary went some way towards *triangulation* and a multi-method approach. However, as Wolcott (1994) maintains, by addressing a question to more than one informant or source of information, you are inevitably going to receive more than one answer, and in doing so it is impossible to check and verify each source.

5. Report Fully

Comments and observations that I did not fully understand were included in the presentation of data. Although my own views of the lives of Asian girls underwent a metamorphosis, I still cannot claim to fully understand the girls’ circumstances, thoughts or feelings. The ‘report of findings’ is, at times,

therefore limited to merely telling the story, without offering any real explanation.

6. Be Candid

Wolcott (1994) advocates placing the researcher 'squarely into the settings or situations being described' (page, 351), including feelings and personal reactions. Whilst Wolcott questions his own possible over involvement, I found myself reticent to play a central role in the study. I made every effort to include my own background and its affect upon my interest in the subject of Asian young women, but I found it extremely difficult to reveal my own position. In retrospect, increased transparency of my own biases, feelings and thoughts may have enabled the reader to view an additional dimension. Wolcott makes the distinction between revealing feelings and imposing judgements, the point being that, even in suggesting recommendations for the future, one is making value judgements about what should be done.

7. Seek Feedback

With the 'spectre' of validity hanging over me, I passed half of the staff transcripts back to the respondents and asked for their feedback. This process did not radically change the data, although some tutors wrote in additional comments and thoughts. I did not seek feedback from the young women themselves, although, in retrospect, it would have been helpful to do so. At the time, I felt that in producing multiple copies of the transcripts, where more than one girl's comments were recorded, confidentiality could be breached. However, by reconvening the groups, I could have sought verbal feedback. I did, however, give a sample of the girls' transcripts to two Asian female educational psychologists, several colleagues and friends, and my supervisor, and discussed their views in relation to my own.

8. Try to Achieve Balance

Wolcott suggests returning to the setting or field notes, in order to be *rigorously subjective*. There is a balance to be found between including everything and including only phenomenon that is of interest, and relevance, to the study. The selection of data to be included was subjective and clearly another researcher would have made different choices. If the emancipatory paradigm were taken to its logical conclusion, the respondents themselves would choose relevant data. However, this in itself does not eradicate bias. If Amina (case study one) had chosen which data seemed most relevant to her view point, her choices might have confirmed the notion of 'Asian girl as victim'. Alternatively, had Shahida (the subject of case study three) been involved in data analysis, the outcomes may have given an overly optimistic view of what life is like for Asian young women, without including the very real pain and suffering that girls like Amina experience.

9. Write Accurately

Wolcott approaches something like *internal validity* when he suggests that the researcher should make careful checks of words used, to ensure that accurate emphasis or level of importance is given to description and discussion. My writing skills are still in their infancy but I have made every effort to choose my words carefully.

Wolcott's (1994) nine points offer one way of approaching the evaluation of qualitative research. However, some further comments about *generalisation* are of relevance here. The results cannot be generalised to other FE settings, nor can they even be expected to be replicated within Piper College since the student and staff population is shifting and changing over time. Furthermore, the sample cannot be said to be representative of the population of Asian girls and staff at Piper College, since it was self-selected. The first bias occurred when tutors allowed me to enter their groups to discuss my project with the girls. These tutors taught mostly in the arts curriculum and were predominantly female. The girls

who volunteered to be interviewed may have done so for a number of reasons, for example, they felt confident enough to speak about their experiences to an unfamiliar, middle-aged, white female, but questions have to be asked about the young women who chose not to be included in the study. Did they represent girls for whom any discussion about their lives would be too stressful? Would this mean that there were more highly stressed girls at Piper College than were represented in the sample? It is important to reiterate that I was drawn to the study because of the worrying numbers of referrals of Asian girls to the educational psychology service. The analysis of my research revealed young women who, in the main, had positive experiences, but this does not negate the very real difficulties of girls who may be suffering in silence, and did not choose to be part of my research. However, lessons learned from the Asian girls at Piper College do have implications for future research, to which the discussion will now turn.

Implications for Future Research

The modest scale of this study, involving only one college and the self-selected sample, provides many possibilities for future research.

The most crucial aspect for future studies would be to address the same research questions in a number of different FE settings across the UK. Piper College is situated in a multi-ethnic London borough where a policy of 'equal opportunities for all' is actively promoted and where the Asian community is generally regarded by local society as being an integral and positive part of the borough. It would, therefore, be helpful to examine FE settings in more rural areas and in other inner city populations where the Asian community is experiencing overt racism and hardship. For example, Asian young women in Oldham, Manchester (the scene of race riots, June, 2001), would undoubtedly have different stories to tell.

Asian girls were in the majority amongst female students at Piper College. It would be of interest to apply the research questions in FE colleges where Asian students are a small minority and, therefore, are less able to find support in a close Asian peer group.

Future research might also apply the emancipatory paradigm in a more 'pure form', for example, by involving the girls themselves in the research planning, process and analysis. At the very least, by returning to the young women at the end of any study, to check the relevance of the analytical process and outcomes.

In order to confirm or deny the relevance of the alternative theoretical approach that I have suggested, it would be necessary to apply its principles to studies that involve larger numbers of Asian young women in diverse FE settings across the UK. It would be important to determine how far such a positive model is relevant to the experiences of Asian young women who are over-represented in vulnerable groups, for example, para-suicidal adolescents admitted to hospital casualty departments or child-guidance clinics (as in the studies of Glover et al., 1989; Merrill and Owens, 1986; Handy et al., 1991). Furthermore, future studies of Asian young women in FE colleges might widen the sociological perspective, taking into account educational policy, rather than use the psychological approach taken in this research project.

Within the college setting, future projects might implement the recommendations of this study and evaluate the effectiveness of such measures. Future projects might also devise ways to enable Asian girls to listen to each other, share their skills and help each other, especially those who experience very real and extreme anxieties. The college system itself might be evaluated and the staff enabled to develop appropriate listening and supportive skills, in order to go some way towards lifting the veil that renders many Asian young women's emotional and pastoral needs invisible.

Appendix 1

Pilot Study Questionnaire

Name: _____ [Number: _____]
 (For the researcher's records only)

A QUESTIONNAIRE ABOUT STRESS

[Number: _____]

THANK YOU FOR AGREEING TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH

**Please answer all the questions, where you can.
 Remember, all your answers are confidential.**

1. What is your age? _____ (years)
2. What course are you following? (e.g. GNVQ, A'Levels etc.)

3. In which country were your parents born?
 Mother: _____
 Father: _____
4. In which country were you born? _____
5. What is your parents religion? (Please tick):
 Muslim: ____; Sikh: ____; Hindu: ____; Christian ____
 Jew: ____; Other (please state): _____
6. What is your religion? (Please tick):
 Muslim: ____; Sikh: ____; Hindu: ____; Christian: ____; Jew: ____
 Other (please state): _____
7. Do you have any brothers or sisters? Yes: ____; No: ____
8. Please write down the three things that cause you the most stress or worry in college
 - a) _____
 - b) _____
 - c) _____
 - d) any other stressors: _____

9. Looking at your answers to question 8, please say how **often** you feel stressed or anxious about each of these things:

- a) every day: ____ once a week: ____ once a month ____ every 2 to 3 months: ____
once a year: ____
- b) every day: ____ once a week: ____ once a month: ____ every 2 to 3 months: ____
once a year: ____
- c) every day: ____ once a week: ____ once a month: ____ every 2 to 3 months: ____
once a year: ____
- d) every day: ____ once a week: ____ once a month ____ every 2 to 3 months: ____
once a year: ____

10. Looking at your answers to question 8, please say how **long** you have you been worried about each one:

- a) ____ months ____ years
- b) ____ months ____ years
- c) ____ months ____ years
- d) ____ months ____ years

11. Looking at your answers to question 8, do you think college staff realize how you are feeling about each one:

- a) Yes: ____ No: ____
- b) Yes: ____ No: ____
- c) Yes: ____ No: ____
- d) yes : ____ No: ____

12. Please write down the three things that cause you the most stress or worry outside of college e.g. at home

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) any other stressors: _____

13. Looking at your answers to question 12, please say how often you feel stressed or anxious about each of these things:

- a) every day: ____ once a week: ____ once a month ____
every 2 to 3 months: ____ once a year: ____
- b) every day: ____ once a week: ____ once a month: ____
every 2 to 3 months: ____ once a year: ____
- c) every day: ____ once a week: ____ once a month: ____
every 2 to 3 months: once a year: ____
- d) every day: ____ once a week: ____ once a month ____

14. Looking at your answers to question 12, please say how long you have been worried about :

- a) ____ months ____ years
- b) ____ months ____ years
- c) ____ months ____ years
- d) ____ months ____ years

15. When you do have a problem or are worried about something, who do you talk to?
(please tick one or more)

- a) a friend ____ (girl: ____ boy: ____)
- b) a family member: ____ (mother: ____ father: ____ older sister: ____ older brother ____
younger sister: ____ younger brother: ____; other relative: ____)
- c) a member of college staff: ____ (personal tutor: ____; senior tutor: ____;
subject teacher: ____; educational psychologist or counsellor: ____
other member of staff: ____)
- d) Other: ____ (family friend: ____; local community or religious leader: ____;
Family doctor: ____; counsellor or other support agency: ____;
other: ____)

16. What do you find most helpful?

- a) Just talking: ____
- b) Getting specific advice about what to do ____
- c) Other (please state): _____

17. When you do have a problem or are worried about something, who would be the person or persons **least likely** to understand?
(please tick one or more)

- a) a friend ____ (girl: ____ boy: ____)
- b) a family member: ____ (mother: ____ father: ____ sister: ____ brother ____
other relative : ____)
- c) a member of college staff: ____ (personal tutor: ____; senior tutor: ____;
subject teacher: ____; educational psychologist or counsellor: ____
other member of staff: ____)
- d) Other: ____ (family friend: ____; local community or religious leader: ____;
family doctor: ____; counsellor or other support agency: ____;
other:[please state] _____)

18. What would you **like** to be doing in 5 years time: _____

19. How likely is it that you **will** be doing your answer to question 18

not at all likely: ____ fairly likely: ____ highly likely: ____

20. What factor or factors might stop you achieving your answer to question 18?

21. What could each of the following people **do** to help you stay stress free in order to achieve your answer to question 18?

- a) friends: _____
- b) brothers and sisters: _____
- c) mother: _____
- d) father: _____
- e) college staff: _____
- f) others (please state): _____

22. Please write anything else about how you are feeling and stress that has not been covered:

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP!

Appendix 2

The Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, S., Kamarck, T. and Mermelstein, R.; 1983)

Name:

Date: Record Number:

Instructions

The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, you will be asked to indicate how often you felt or thought a certain way. Although some of the questions are similar, there are differences between them and you should treat each one as a separate question. The best approach is to answer each question fairly quickly. That is, don't try to count up the number of times you felt a particular way, but rather indicate the alternative that seems like a reasonable estimate.

For each question choose from the following alternatives:

- 0 = never
- 1 = almost never
- 2 = sometimes
- 3 = fairly often
- 4 = very often

1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly? ☐
2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life? ☐
3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed? ☐
4. In the last month, how often have you dealt with irritating life hassles? ☐
5. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were effectively coping with important changes that were occurring in your life? ☐
6. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems? ☐
7. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way? ☐
8. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things you had to do? ☐
9. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life? ☐
10. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things? ☐
11. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control? ☐
12. In the last month, how often have you found yourself thinking about things that you have to accomplish? ☐
13. In the last month, how often have you been able to control the way you spend your time? ☐
14. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them? ☐

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Appendix 3

The Adolescent Coping Scale - Short Form (Frydenberg, E. and Lewis, R.; 1993)

Students have a number of concerns or worries about things such as work, family, friends, the world and the like. Below is a list of ways in which people of your age cope with a wide variety of concerns or problems. Please indicate by circling the appropriate number, the things you do to deal with your concerns or worries. Work down the page and circle 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 as you come to each statement. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any one statement but give the answer which best describes how you feel.

	Doesn't apply or don't do it	Used very little	Used some- times	Used often	Used a great deal
1. Talk to other people about my concern to help me sort it out	1	2	3	4	5
2. Work at solving the problem to the best of my ability	1	2	3	4	5
3. Work hard	1	2	3	4	5
4. Worry about what will happen to me	1	2	3	4	5
5. Spend more time with boy/girl friend	1	2	3	4	5
6. Improve my relationship with others	1	2	3	4	5
7. Wish a miracle would happen	1	2	3	4	5
8. I have no way of dealing with the situation	1	2	3	4	5
9. Find a way to let off steam; for example cry, scream, drink, take drugs etc.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Join with people who have the same concern	1	2	3	4	5
11. Shut myself off from the problem so that I can avoid it	1	2	3	4	5
12. See myself as being at fault	1	2	3	4	5
13. Don't let others know how I am feeling	1	2	3	4	5
14. Pray for help and guidance so that everything will be all right	1	2	3	4	5
15. Look on the bright side of things and think of all that is good	1	2	3	4	5
16. Ask a professional person for help	1	2	3	4	5
17. Make time for leisure activities	1	2	3	4	5
18. Keep fit and healthy	1	2	3	4	5
19. List any <i>other</i> things you do to cope with your concern/s	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix 4

Staff Interview Schedule

1. Name: _____
2. Job Title: _____
3. Teaching: Subject: _____
 Amount of time spent teaching/ tutor group? _____
4. What do you think are some of the things that cause Asian girls most stress or worry in college?
5. What do you think causes most stress or worry for Asian young women outside of college? (e.g. home, community)
6. How do you think these stressors effect their work in college?
7. Are there times when the girls seem to be more stressed? E.g. exams, start of the year.
8. What do you think Asian girls are most likely to do when they have a problem or feel stressed? How do they cope?
9. How would other people know that they were stressed or worried? (e.g. college staff, their friends, parents etc.).... What signs would they give, if any?
10. Who do you think they are most likely to go to for help... who would know about it?
11. What do you think would help these girls ? In college... generally..
12. Do you think you are able to recognize when Asian girls are stressed or have a problem? ... How?
13. Do you think other staff members (generally) are able to recognize problems or when Asian girls are stressed?
14. Do you think that Asian girls talk to their parents? Do you think their parents would understand?
15. Do you think that most Asian girls achieve their goals in college? E.g. course success
16. What do you think are the main factors that stop Asian girls achieving their goals?
17. Any other general comments?

Appendix 5

Initial Student Information Sheet

Name: _____ [Number: _____]

(For the researcher's records only)

A QUESTIONNAIRE ABOUT STRESS

[Number: _____]

THANK YOU FOR AGREEING TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH

Please answer all the questions, where you can.

Remember, all your answers are confidential.

1. What is your age? _____(years)

2. What course are you following? (e.g. GNVQ, A'Levels & subjects etc.)

3. In which country were your parents born?
 Mother: _____
 Father: _____

4. In which country were you born? _____

5. What is your parents religion? (Please tick):
 Muslim: ____; Sikh: ____; Hindu: ____; Christian ____
 Jew: ____; Other (please state): _____

6. What is your religion? (Please tick):
 Muslim: ____; Sikh: ____; Hindu: ____; Christian: ____;
 Jew: ____; Other (please state): _____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP.

Appendix 6

Student Interview Schedule

- What are the things that cause you most stress or worry in college.?
 - Is there anything else that makes you feel stressed in college?
 - What are the things that cause you most stress or worry outside of college e.g. home, in the community?
 - Is there anything else that makes you feel stressed outside of college?
 - How does this effect your college work?
 - How often do you feel stressed? (every day, every week, a few times a month, a few times a year)
 - How long have you felt this way? (since school, when at school: primary, secondary a few days, months, years etc.?)
 - What do you do when you feel stressed or have a problem?
 - How might other people know that you are stressed or worried?... what signs do you give (if any)? (parents, college staff, friends etc)
 - Who do you talk to or go to for help... who knows about it?
 - Do you have anyone who you feel believes in you?
 - Where do you feel you can 'be yourself'?
 - What do you find to be most helpful?
 - Do you think college staff realize how you feel.. or what the problems are?
 - Do you think your parents realize how you feel or what the problems are?
 - When you have a problem who would be the person least likely to understand?
 - What would you like to be doing in 5 years time?
 - What might stop you achieving your goal?
 - What could other people do to help you? Parents, college, friends etc.
- THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP!**

Appendix 7

Letter to Staff Requesting Comments and Feedback

Staff Memo

Date: 12.4.99

Dear _____,

Thank you for giving your time and allowing me to interview you about Asian young women, stress and coping.

I am giving a copy of transcripts to a sample of staff to try and ensure some level of validity and accuracy.

I have enclosed a copy of your transcript and wondered if you would be kind enough to give it a quick read through. If you have any further comments to make or if you think I may have misheard what you said (and typed up the error), please feel free to get back to me. Any comments or notes can be left at reception and I will pick them up.

I really do appreciate all the help and cooperation you have given, since my research certainly wouldn't be possible without it! As I mentioned, where I refer to our interview in my final thesis, all comments will be confidential.

Many thanks,

Beverley Thirkell

Appendix 8

Research Poster and Return Slips

STRESS...

AND ASIAN YOUNG WOMEN IN COLLEGE!

© Would you like to help with research ?

I am a professional researcher looking into stress amongst Asian young women in Further Education colleges. I need to know what **you** find stressful and what **you** would find helpful.

I plan to interview groups of 4 Asian female students, for one hour .

© Confidentiality would be guaranteed.

If you would like to help: please complete and return to college reception:

To: Beverley Thirkell [Stress and Asian young women]

Name: _____ Course: _____

I would be able to join a group on a: (please tick)

Monday ☐ [am: ☐ pm: ☐ 1pm - 2pm: ☐

Tuesday ☐ [am: ☐ pm: ☐ 1pm - 2pm: ☐

Thursday ☐ [am: ☐ pm: ☐ 1pm - 2pm: ☐

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP!

Appendix 9

Letter to Staff: Student Interviews

STAFF MEMO

DATE: _____

Dear _____,

Re: Student Interviews: Stress and Coping of Asian young Women in Further Education.

Thank you for agreeing to allow me to meet the students in your Tutor Group.

The response from college staff was really helpful and I now have enough interviews to 'keep me going' until Christmas!

However, I would be very grateful if I could contact you again during the spring term to arrange a time and date to come in to your Tutor Group and talk to the students.

Thank you again for your help... without which I would be stuck!!

Regards,

Beverley Thirkell

Appendix 10

Student Interviews: Schedule Form

Stress and Coping of Asian Young Women in Further Education
(Beverley Thirkell)

All interviews will be private and confidential

Interviews to be held between 9.30am - 4.00pm on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. The interviews will be in groups of 2 to 5 girls and will last 30 minutes to 1 hour.

Thank you for your help!

Name:

Tutor Group:

State convenient time:

Mondays: Tuesdays:

Thursdays:

Appendix 11

Student Interviews: Letter of Confirmation

Dear _____,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in research about stress and coping.

Please would you meet me in the foyer (in front of reception),

On: _____

At: _____.

There will be a small group of 2 to 6 girls.

May I reassure you that the interviews will be confidential and any information used will ensure that all those involved remain anonymous.

If you have any concerns or questions please leave a message for me at reception.

I look forward to seeing you soon.

Regards,

Beverley Thirkell

Appendix 12

Staff Interviews: Letter of Confirmation

Staff Memo

Date:

Dear _____,

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed about stress and coping amongst Asian young women.

I have put aside:

_____ and do hope
that the time and date will be convenient to you. If not, please
'phone me so that we can arrange another time (0181 529 4810).

Please would you meet me in the main staff room and we can then
find another room to talk.

May I reassure you that the interview will be confidential and any
information used will ensure that all those involved remain
anonymous.

Many thanks for your help. I look forward to seeing you soon.

Regards,

Beverley Thirkell

Appendix 13

STATEMENT OF WORKING PRACTISE: (July 10th, 1998)

Ph.D Research carried out by Beverley Thirkell

This is to certify that :

- Anonymity of students and staff as well as the college itself will be maintained at all times, during the research process and on completion. This will include any published materials or public presentations. (Fictitious names and labels will be used where specific data is discussed)
- All data collected by the researcher, whether of a qualitative or quantitative nature, will be used only for the purposes of research and will be presented in a form to ensure anonymity is preserved.
- The British Psychological Society: Code of Conduct, ethical principles and guidelines will be strictly adhered to.

Beverley Thirkell

(Educational Psychologist; Ph.D student: Institute of Education, University of London)

Appendix 14

The Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al. 1983):

Discussion of Parametric Tests, Internal Reliability and Score Distribution

There is much controversy about the use of parametric or non-parametric tests, whereby there are guidelines as to when each is appropriate. Generally, parametric tests are used when:

1. The scale of measurement is of equal interval or ratio scaling
2. The distribution of the population scores is normal
3. The variances of both variables are equal or homogenous.

The *PSS* is essentially an attitude test and it cannot be assumed that the student respondents used the scale in an identical way. However, parametric tests are 'routinely applied to such variables' (Bryman and Cramer, 1999) and thus the *t*-test was applied to the data.

Since the *PSS* was a multiple-item scale, it was particularly important to check for internal reliability. That is, the question as to whether the scale is measuring a single idea and hence whether the 14 items that make up the scale are internally consistent (Bryman and Cramer, 1999). Cronbach's alpha was computed (using the SPSS computer package, SPSS Inc., 1998) and items were found to be consistent at $\alpha = 0.7178$, the usual value for consistency being at or over 0.7.

It is interesting to note that whilst there was no significant difference between the perceived stress scores of the Asian and non-Asian groups, the Asian girls demonstrated a greater range of scores. The optimum range of possible scores was

0 – 56. The Asian girls' scores ranged from 16 to 52, whilst the range for non-Asian girls' scores was 17 to 39. The results showed that there was one Asian girl, with an extremely high level of perceived stress, who scored 52. The box plot for the *PSS* scores (below figure A 14.1) shows the middle 50% of

observations (coloured red) and the inter-quartile range. The box plot also indicates the median score (central line) as well as the outlying score. In general, the results of the *PSS* were normally distributed, since the bulk of scores lie around the mid point between the highest and lowest scores, excluding the one extreme 'outlier'.

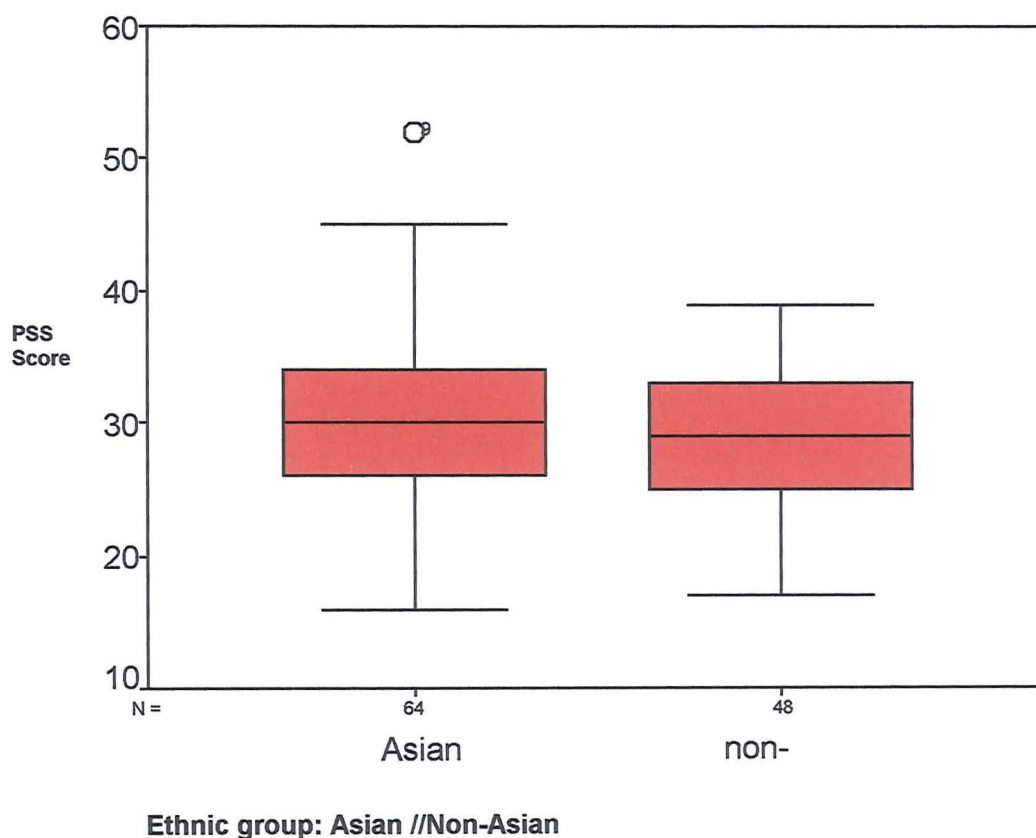


Figure A 14.1 Box Plot: Results of the Perceived Stress Scale

Appendix 15

Letter Regarding Amina

30th November 1998

Dear Kish,

Re: Amina

I thought it might be helpful to put in writing our recent conversation regarding Amina.

I first met Amina as part of the research that I am carrying out at Piper College. During the course of the initial interview I became increasingly concerned about Amina's emotional well being. I offered Amina counselling sessions, an offer I make to all students since some of the issues discussed during interviews is of a sensitive nature. All counselling sessions are confidential and are not recorded for research purposes. I have since met Amina on two other occasions in my capacity as an educational psychologist. In my view, Amina is experiencing emotional difficulties and I would most certainly consider her to be in need of special educational support. I understand that Tom and Ann (personal tutor) are providing appropriate and professional support.

In my view, Amina is unable to adequately cope with her current level of course work. She is following three A-level courses but is grossly underachieving due to her acute emotional needs. You will be aware that Amina is experiencing extreme personal difficulties and I would suggest that unless she is able to cut down her work load she would be likely to suffer from extreme depression and anxiety. I would support Amina's request to follow two A-level courses only.

I do understand that a precedent cannot be set where students give up a subject, but I would stress that Amina presents a unique and special case.

Please let me know if you require further information. In the meantime I will liaise with Tom and Ann and will continue to see Amina on a fortnightly basis.

Yours sincerely,

Beverley Thirkell

Cc. Tom (Head of Faculty: Learning Support and Services)

Appendix 16

Conceptual Framework of The Adolescent Coping Scale (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1993) 18 Coping Strategies and Corresponding Item from the Short Form.

1. **Seek Social Support:** items that indicate an inclination to share the problem with others and enlist support in its management, e.g. *Talk to other people to help me sort it out.*
2. **Focus on Solving the Problem:** tackles the problem systematically by learning about it and takes into account different points of view or options, e.g. *Work at solving the problem to the best of my ability.*
3. **Work Hard and Achieve:** describes commitment, ambition and industry, e.g. *Work hard.*
4. **Worry:** indicates a concern about the future in general terms or more specifically concern with happiness in the future, e.g. *Worry about what will happen to me.*
5. **Invest in Close Friends:** is about engaging in a particular intimate relationship, e.g. *Spend more time with boy/girl friend.*
6. **Seek to Belong:** indicates a caring and concern for one's relationship with others in general and more specifically concern with what others think, e.g. *Improve my relationship with others.*
7. **Wishful Thinking:** characterised by items that are based on hope and anticipation of positive outcome, e.g. *Wish a miracle would happen.*
8. **Not Coping:** reflects the individual's inability to deal with the problem and the development of psychosomatic symptoms, e.g. *I have no way of dealing with the situation.*
9. **Tension Reduction:** reflects an attempt to make oneself feel better by releasing tension, e.g. *find a way to let off steam; e.g. cry, scream, drink, take drugs etc.*
10. **Social Action:** is about letting others know what is of concern and enlisting support, e.g. *join with people who have the same concern.*
11. **Ignore the Problem:** reflects a conscious blocking out of the problem, e.g. *Shut myself off and avoid the problem.*
12. **Self-Blame:** indicates that the individuals see themselves as responsible for the concern or worry, e.g. *See myself as being at fault.*
13. **Keep to Self:** reflects the individual's withdrawal from others and a desire to keep others from knowing about concerns, e.g. *don't let others know how I am feeling.*
14. **Seek Spiritual Support:** reflects prayer and belief in the assistance of a spiritual leader or God, e.g. *Pray for help and guidance so that everything will be all right.*
15. **Focus on the Positive:** indicates a cheerful outlook on the current situation, e.g. *Look on the bright side of things and think of all that is good.*
16. **Seek Professional Help:** denotes the use of a professional advisor, such as a teacher or counsellor, e.g. *ask a professional person for help.*
17. **Seek Relaxing Diversions:** describes leisure activities, e.g. *Make time for leisure activities.*
18. **Physical Recreation:** relates to playing sport and keeping fit, e.g. *keep fit and healthy.*

Appendix 17

(Frydenberg and Lewis, 1993)

Adolescent Coping Scale Scoring Sheet – Short Form

GENERAL ☐
SPECIFIC ☐

Name _____ Date _____

Scale	Items	Total score	Adjusted score
Solving the Problem	2 ___ + 3 ___ + 6 ___ + 15 ___ + 17 ___ + 18 ___	___ × 3 = ___	
Reference to Others	1 ___ + 10 ___ + 14 ___ + 16 ___ +	___ × 5 = ___	
Non-productive Coping	4 ___ + 5 ___ + 6 ___ + 7 ___ + 8 ___ + 9 ___ + 11 ___ + 12 ___ + 13 ___	___ × 2 = ___	

Profile of Coping Styles – Short Form

GENERAL ☐
SPECIFIC ☐

Name (or Group) _____ Date _____

Style	<div>Not used at all</div> <div>Used very little</div> <div>Used sometimes</div> <div>Used frequently</div> <div>Used a great deal</div>									
Solving the Problem	18	27	36	45	54	63	72	81	90	
Reference to Others	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100	
Non-productive Coping	18	27	36	45	54	63	72	81	90	

Appendix 18

The Adolescent Coping Scale (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1993):

Discussion of Results, Internal Reliability and Score Distribution

The internal reliability for the ACS (all 18 items) was moderately good, at Cronbach's alpha equal to 0.06679.

The coping style: **Solving the Problem** is measured by the response given to six items of the *Short Form* (item numbers: 2,3,6,15,17,18; appendix 16) and is characterised by the respondent 'actively doing something' about the problem, for example, working hard or making an effort to focus on the positive. There were no significant differences between the responses of Asian and non-Asian girls and both groups used this strategy *sometimes*. Neither were there any significant differences between the scores of girls from Muslim, Hindu or Sikh religious backgrounds. Similarly, there were no significant differences between the scores for the style **Solving the Problem**, when ethnic background (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi) was considered.

The box plot (figure A 18.1) shows the shape and dispersion of the scores on the **Solving the Problem** sub-scale. The scores were normally distributed and there were no 'outliers'. The box plot is a useful way of gaining a graphic overview of the results: the median score is indicated by the central line, the middle 50% of observations are marked in red and the inter-quartile range is also indicated by the 'whiskers'.

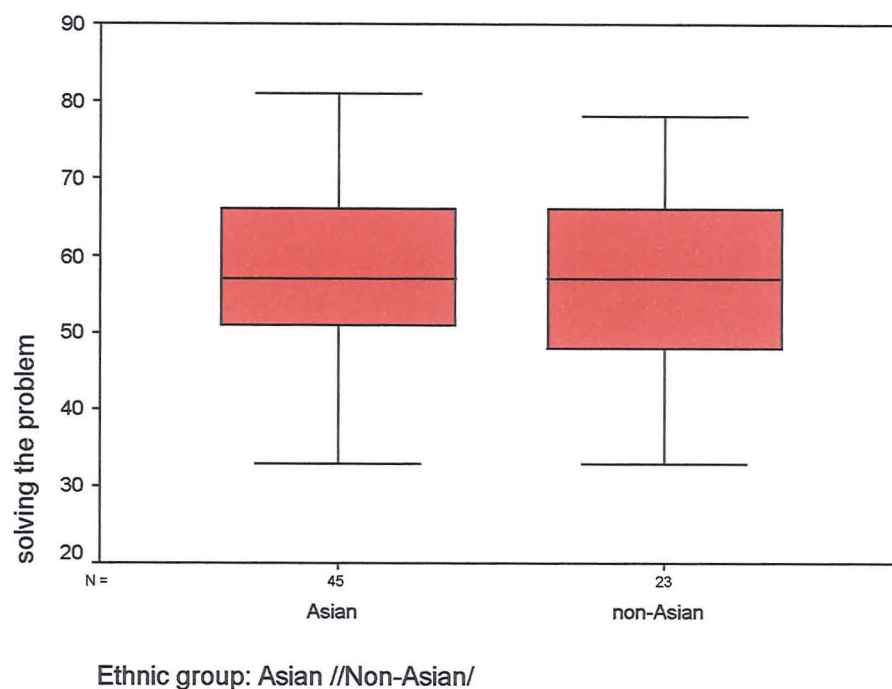


Figure A 18.1 Box Plot showing the Results of the Adolescent Coping Scale: Solving the Problem

Cronbach's alpha indicated that there was moderate internal reliability for items in **Solving the Problem**, since items were found to be consistent at alpha equal to 0.6001.

The coping style: **Reference to Others**, is measured by the response given to four items of the *Short Form* (item numbers: 1, 10, 14 16; appendix 16) and is characterised by the respondent seeking social, professional or spiritual support, for example, by joining with others who have similar concerns. There were no significant differences between the responses of Asian and non-Asian young women. Again, both groups used this coping style *sometimes*.

There were no significant differences between the scores of girls from Muslim, Hindu or Sikh religious backgrounds. However, young women whose fathers were born in Pakistan scored significantly higher (mean scores: 63.61) on this sub-scale than those whose fathers' origins were from India (mean scores 51.11). The level of significance (t-test for equality of means, 2 – tailed) was at 0.029. The scores of those whose ethnic background was from Bangladesh were not

significantly different to either of the other two ethnic groups i.e. Indian or Pakistani.

Figure A18.2 shows a box plot of the results from the **Reference to Others** sub-scale and graphically illustrates that the dispersion of scores was normal, with no outlying scores. It is important to note that Cronbach's alpha, which demonstrates the extent to which the items of the sub-scale measure a single idea, was equal to 0.3516. Items are usually considered to be internally reliable at or above 0.7. This implies that the **Reference to Others** items comprise a number of conceptual dimensions rather than one central issue. Furthermore, the lack of internal reliability on this sub-scale means that all the results, significant or otherwise, should be interpreted with caution.

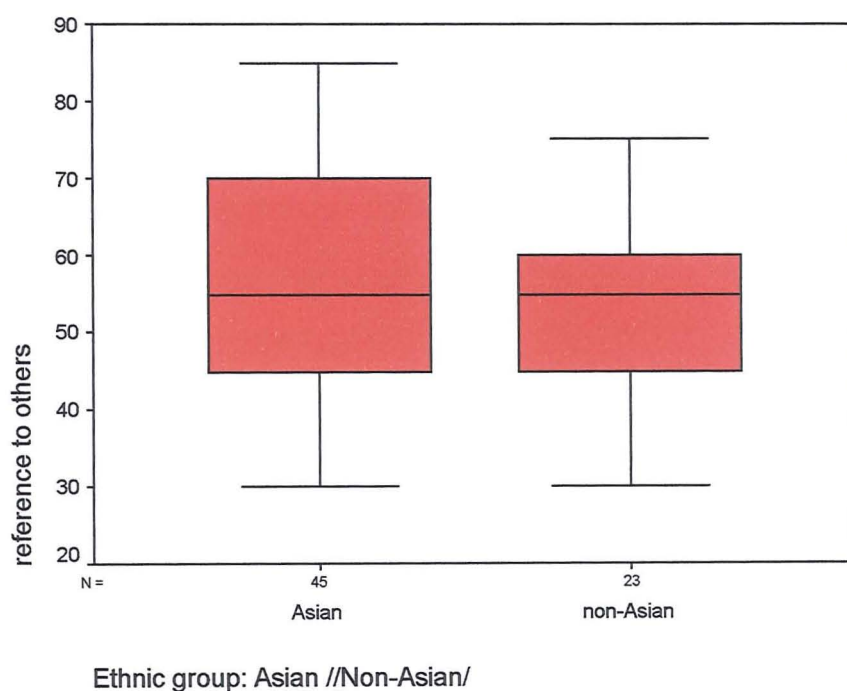


Figure A 18.2 Box Plot showing the Results of the Adolescent Coping Scale: Reference to Others

The coping style: **Non-productive Coping**, is measured by responses given to nine items of the *Short Form* (item numbers: 4,5,6,7,8,9,11,12,13; appendix 16) and is characterised by the respondent's lack of active attempts to either solve the problem or approach others for specific guidance. Examples of behaviour in this category include: worrying, spending more time with friends usually in an effort

to feel a sense of belonging, ignoring problems or wishing they would go away, as well as becoming isolated from others. In contrast to the other coping styles, there was a significant difference between the responses of Asian and non-Asian girls. Asian girls indicated that they use **Non-productive Coping** strategies significantly more than do their non-Asian female peers, although both groups use the strategy *sometimes*.

There were no significant differences between scores for either religious (Muslim, Hindu or Sikh) or ethnic background (father's ethnic origins from: India, Pakistan or Bangladesh).

The box plot (A 18.3) graphically presents the scores, indicating that there were no outlying scores but that the Asian young women use the style of **Non-productive Coping** significantly more than the non-Asian girls.

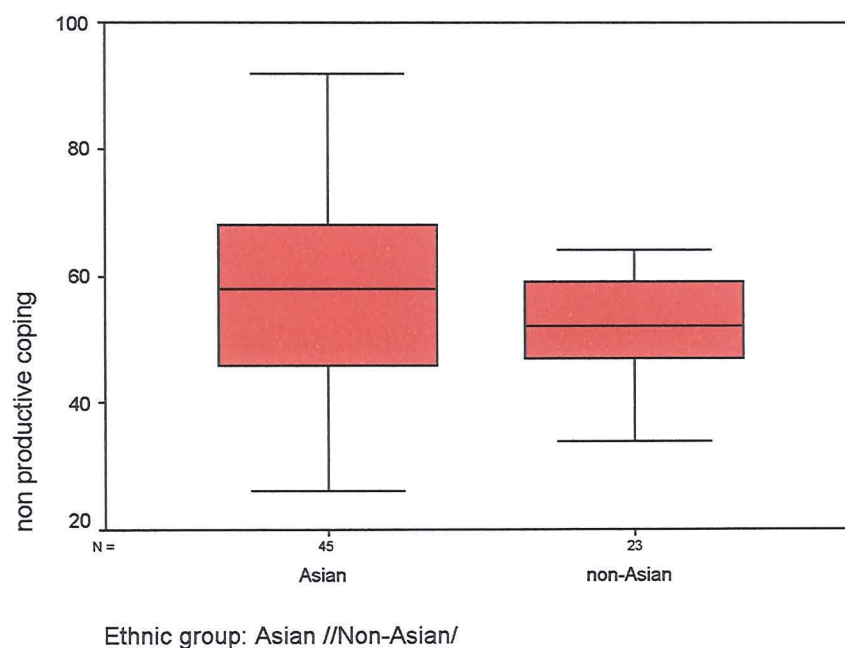


Figure A 18.3 Box Plot showing the Results of the Adolescent Coping Scale: Non-productive Coping

Cronbach's alpha was equal to 0.7094, which indicates that there was good internal reliability for the items demonstrating the use of the **Non-productive Coping** style.

Appendix 19

Management Structure at Piper College and Job Descriptions

Principal (1); Vice Principals (4); Heads of Faculty (5); Curriculum Managers (14); Senior Tutors (4); Tutors/subject teachers; Administration/ office clerks.

Staff Interviewed:

(All names have been changed)

Job Description:

- Kish: Director/Vice Principal: staff development; pastoral; community; business links.
- Beth: Deputy Director: recruitment; guidance and support; head of student services.
- Tom: Head of Faculty: learning and support services; English and support teacher.
- Linda: Curriculum Manager: careers.
- Sue: Curriculum Manager: chemistry.
- Lisa: Senior Tutor, biology teacher, child protection.
- Caroline: Senior Tutor, marketing manager, non-teaching.
- Hilary: Senior Tutor, English teacher.
- Janice: Psychology and social sciences co-ordinator - psychology teacher.
- Ann: Language and learning support teacher; teacher of English as a second language.
- Iqbal: Tutor for English as a second language, tutor group.
- Iram: Tutor for health and social care.
- Abdul: Teacher of sociology.
- Jean: Student administration manager, non-teaching.
- Nasma: Student counsellor (Asian community worker - services purchased by college)
- Lynn: Educational Psychologist (Borough employee – services purchased)

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